WHEN·A·MAN COMMUTES

·ALAN·DALE·

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BY

ALAN DALE
Author of "The Great Wet Way," etc.

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H. B. MARTIN

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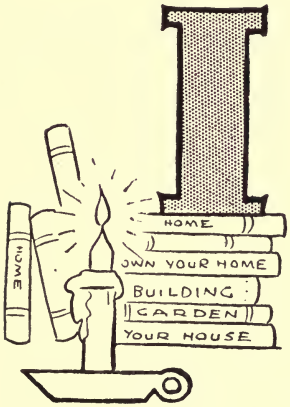
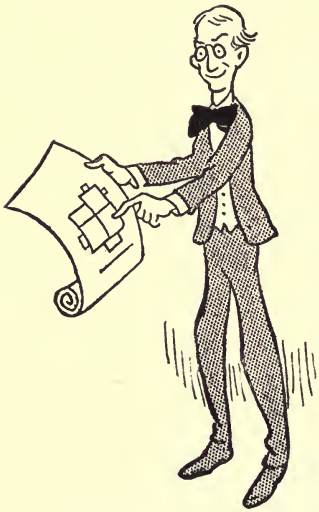
I DEDICATE THIS BOOK
TO MY DAUGHTER
MARJORIE

WHEN A MAN COMMUTES



I HAVE never read any of those voluminous and pyrotechnical tracts entitled "Own Your Own Home" because they always seemed to me to be so intensely insipid. I have invariably maintained that any man who does not own his own home, is not worth powder and shot. He may not own his own *house,* but if he has been educated with properly tyrannical, and patriarchal ideas, there is no reason why he should not own his own *home.* Women certainly know how to own their own homes. That is an innately feminine notion. Really, I never yearned to own even a house, a stable, or a garage. The house-holders of my acquaintance appeared to be most miserable,

and rigidly tied down to that bit of earth that they were alleged to "own." To live in the house that some other fellow thinks he owns, has been my selfishly happy motto. Let him worry with taxes, assessments, and all the other sordid details. However, I was tempted, and I fell, with something more than the usual loud and sickening thud.



Nothing ever surprised me as much. It was inconceivable. I am passionately fond of the city. I love the asphalt, and the grime and the crowds, and the smoke, and the excavations, and the Pompeii-like aspect of dear old Manhattan. I am not at all fond of a small city. New York is just about the size that I admire. So for that reason—at least, I can only suppose it was for that reason—I

was induced to own a house on Long Island. Friends and well-wishers—you know the brand! —told me that I ought to "settle." I don't know why. It sounded horribly final. They begged me to think of the "coming years," just as though years wouldn't come anyway, whether I thought of them, or not. Really, I should prefer to think of years that did not come. At least they would be more interesting.

"Why live in an apartment?" they argued.

And the only retort I could think of was: "Why not?"

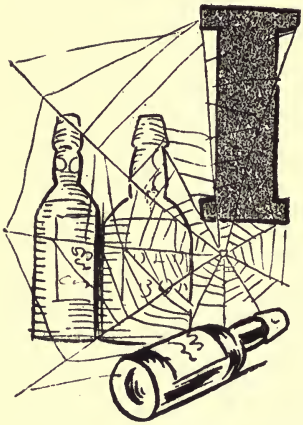
The upshot of it all was that I bought some land—otherwise "lots."

"LOT" seems to be anything but that. I found I had three; awfully small and cramped, but marvellously "open." Oh, how open they were! Never in my life had I imagined anything could be as open. I should have preferred to be hemmed in by pretty houses and respectable, and variegated signs of humanity, but my "lots" had magnificent views of nothing at all. "Thorough country" they call that, I believe.

As soon as it is known that you are possessed of "lots"—and the glad tidings travel by rapid transit—all sorts of incredible people dog your footsteps. I was deluged with feverish applicants for house-building. My daily mail was torture. It made my morning egg listless, and

dull. All my correspondents seemed to have given place to the anxious contractors and home-purveyors.

Some kind friend, seeing my plight, led me to an architect, and that was my first experience —and my *last*—with that noble profession. This architect was quite an agreeable man—the sort that would be kind to his mother, and "perfectly grand" to all his relatives. He had a sister, an architectress, who was also ineffably amiable, and very much on the alert with suggestions and advice. She seemed to take a great fancy to me. Oddly enough, they insisted upon regarding me as a humourist, and they laughed heartily at everything I said. A more appreciative audience I have never found. At first, this was naturally rather flattering, but later, I began to loathe my own humour. Each suggestion I made aroused sister to exuberant mirth, and brother followed. They were convulsed at my "sallies." Yet, as I afterwards discovered, both were really serious souls, full of the gloom of living.



I TOLD the architect that what I particularly wanted, was a large entrance hall, and that I didn't mind much about anything else. No Gilbertian quip or Wilde epigram ever made such a hit as that feeble remark.

"You *are* droll" said sister. "Don't you realize that if you have a hall as big as that, all your bedrooms must suffer, and be fearfully cramped?"

"I don't like big bedrooms" I ventured. "I love to be cosy."

More mirth. The he-architect then spake these words: "Do you want a place to live in, or just to show?"

"I want what I have told you I want," I replied haughtily, for, like Bunthorne, I am very terrible when thwarted. "If I can live in it, I will—at any rate, I shall try. If not, I shall

show it to friends, on presentation of a visiting card."

There were one or two details that I insisted upon mentioning. I need not bother you with them. The he-architect, and likewise the she-architect, declared that they would be impossible—quite impossible. When I informed them that they were *sine qua non's* of my house, they grew afraid. I think they imagined that *sine qua non's* had something to do with the building laws, and they surrendered. After all, as long as I was paying for it, I might as well have what I wanted.

The he-architect drew up plans on a pretty shade of blue paper, and explained them to me. Certain lines meant rooms; others signified windows, doors and enclosures.

"In the basement," he said, "you will have a wine cellar, and upstairs there will be a laundry chute."

"You needn't bother about a wine cellar," I declared. "We are all rather dry. I own a cellaret for immediate use."

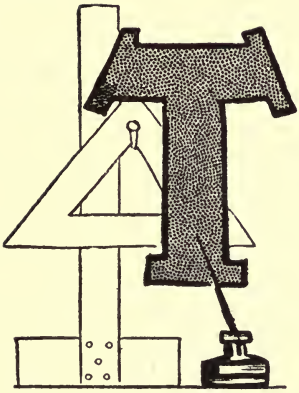
I don't know why, but the wine cellar seemed

to be on his nerves. It was the only point he was very keen about. Whether I wore a bibulous look, or he saw possibilities of a bottle-nose in my mobile features, I cannot say. The she-architect was equally insistent. She looked inclined to burst into tears, as I argued about the wine cellar.

"Could I keep sarsaparilla there?" I asked.

"Of course," replied the he-architect seriously. "I built a wine cellar for the Joysons at Great Neck, and they keep paint pots in it."

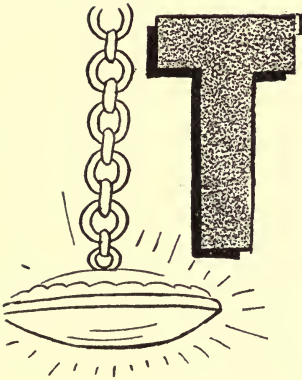
"Then why not call it a paint-pot cellar?" I queried, and their laughter was loud and long. In the end I gave in, for the sake of peace, and permitted the wine cellar. It would do me no harm, and it would please them. One cannot be aggressively selfish. I like to do a kindly act occasionally, so I ordered the wine cellar for those architects. I may add that when I surveyed the first building operations prior to sailing for Europe, the wine cellar was the only feature they pointed out to me. There it was, prominent in that hole in the ground, and I had to pretend that it was a tremendous joy to me.



THE architect, as soon as he has completed his plans to his own satisfaction if not to yours, then proceeds to find a builder. "Sealed bids" are what he seeks, and it is really quite droll, like a game at which everybody wins but you. There is a surprise in every envelope—sometimes a big surprise. The builders vie with each other, and simply clamour for your job, and it is very exciting—for them. My architect knew a fine contractor—in fact the she-architect said he was "elegant"—and hoped that he would win the prize, and strangely enough, he did. It seemed to me that as he was particularly friendly with the architect, it might have been expected that he would get the job. I mentioned that idea, but that time, my humour seemed to lack subtlety. Both he and she were

grievously hurt, and they wondered if I suspected them.

Anyway, and be that as it may, it was the architect's friend who built my house. Well-wishers—and I never knew I had so many—told me that this was an absurd arrangement—that the architect and builder should hate each other cordially, so that the former might dictate to the latter and supervise him properly. However, I was satisfied, possessing a large stock of the courage born of ignorance. I had to pay the architect a nice percentage of the cost for supervising the work of his pet friend. I did not permit it to worry me one bit. Really, I was not keen on the house. There are so many houses in New York, that at a pinch, one can always find a residence. Nobody need walk the streets roofless, if he has a little rent money. People who build houses are so particular! If my house turned out badly—well, *tant pis!*



THE architectress was quite a wonderful woman. She knew everything, and I deferred to her judgment reliantly. I leaned upon her. Once or twice, she jarred, but she always won. For instance I said that I liked my living rooms well lighted; that I cannot bear gloom, and that extreme illumination was necessary to my comfort. I wanted the rooms lighted from the centre. "From the centre in these days?" she asked superciliously. "Everybody would laugh at you. Brackets from the sides are correct today. Light from the centre is vulgar and old fashioned."

"So am I," I suggested.

"But your rooms mustn't be," she said, ignoring my self-depreciation, in a rather irritating way.

"Please let me have a chandelier in the drawing room," I pleaded. "I *do* want one."

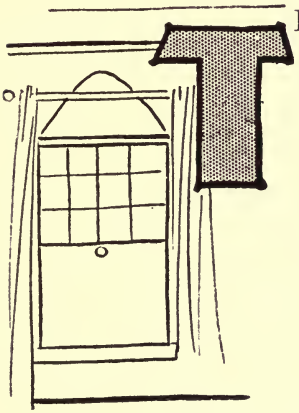
"You want to spoil your beautiful Tudor house?" she queried, and there were tears in her voice.

"I have always longed for a glass chandelier with those jiggly little things that tinkle and sparkle," I said miserably. "I love a splurge of light; it cheers me up so! In the gloom, I am so unhappy."

"If all your friends jeered at you," she retorted, "you would be furious with me. You *must* give in to me. You cannot have a chandelier."

And I never had it. My rooms are so depressing, and so artistic, that sometimes I sob for no reason that I can discover. Some day,

I *will* have a jiggly chandelier, if I have to put it up myself.



THEN I wanted light woodwork and she nearly fainted.

"Light woodwork in an early English house!" she exclaimed. "I did give you credit for consistency, and ideas. Look at your Tudor windows, and think of light woodwork! It would be a crime."

"But it is cheerful," I protested. "*Isn't* it cheerful?"

"If an abomination can cheer you, all right," she said. "I wash my hands of the affair. Everything in your house is oak, and it should be dark. It must be dark."

The he-architect never once came to the rescue. He sat there drawing—drawing. He reminded me of Mrs. Thingummy, in "A Tale of

Two Cities," who was always knitting. He drew and he drew.

"May I have one quite light room?" I pleaded. "Just for *me* to play in? I promise I will never ask people into it. I'll keep it for myself, and you needn't look at it. Come now, I've been very nice, haven't I?"—I put an ingratiating inflection into my voice—"Surely I can have a light playroom for myself?"

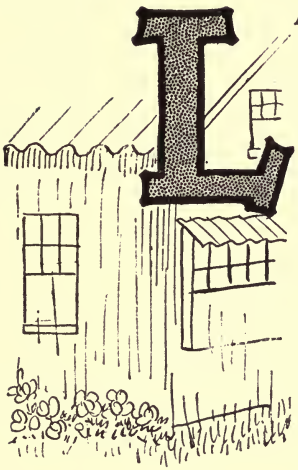
"You have no space to waste on freakishness," she replied relentlessly. "Be sensible and dark, and I can assure you that you will not regret it." Of course I surrendered. They gave me Tudor windows that were frightfully difficult to make. I discovered later that nobody could fit shades or blinds to them, without tremendous trouble, and more tremendous expense. The Tudor windows are much nicer, I suppose, than they look. You have to point them out and declare "They are Tudor" before anybody would suspect it. To the ordinary eye, they are V-shaped affairs that servants refuse to clean. Why I ever had Tudor windows, I don't know. I never asked for them, and

should have been perfectly satisfied with the early-Victorian variety. Then it is such a nuisance when I have friends in the house, explaining the Tudor windows. Of course, in the Tudor days, there were no mosquitoes, and no necessity for screens.

THEY insisted upon building me an "ozone porch," and that ridiculous name rather annoyed me. I told them that if an ozone porch meant air—and I suppose it did—I could get along nicely without an ozone porch. We all of us rather dislike air, you know. It is a horrid thing to say, but we do, and why conceal the fact? Air is dreadfully over-rated, I think. Both the he- and the she-architect said that the ozone porch was for sleeping purposes, and at that, I protested. It would never be used, I declared. It would be a ridiculous incumbrance,

and I thought it quite silly. I had given in about the wine cellar, but I made up my mind to stick it out about the ozone porch. I did stick it out valiantly, but they built it. I tried sleeping there one night, because I hate to see things go to waste, but it was so light, and so blow-y, and so noisy—every cat and dog congregated just underneath—that I went back to my own room before daylight.

They never gave me the laundry chute after all, and I was horribly disappointed. For some occult reason, I yearned for a laundry chute, and I had anticipated many merry moments throwing linens and things down, and watching them fall. The architect said he found that it was unnecessary, as the house was so low. Also, that there was no place for it. I thought of suing him for the laundry chute, for it was in the plans and specifications, but later, I decided to let it go. It was very vexatious. I had counted on playing games every wet Sunday with the laundry chute, and it was the one thing I never got. I should much have preferred it to the ozone porch.



LATER on, however, I discovered that there were many promised things, or at least necessary things, I had never got. I was seriously taken to task because I had no eaves. Now I had never thought of such a thing as an eave! Eaves are always spoken of in the plural, and I should have had dozens of them, I believe. Without them, all the rain pours down upon my flower beds, and spoils everything, and this has caused me much anguish. Everybody has eaves except me. I have my Tudor windows, you know, but eaves are really essential. I must go through life, eave-less.

I insisted upon having a fountain in my entrance hall. That I would *not* give up. The he- and the she-architect rebelled—of course. They were fearfully upset about it. They said

it was a childish whim, and perhaps it was, but it was mine own, after all. They told me that it would be damp and malarial, and would give me sore throats and rheumatism. Still, I persisted. I even grew angry, and said that if I couldn't have a fountain, I wouldn't have a house at all. That time, I put one over on them, and I chuckled. I had, and I have a fountain. It is a nude figure of a sixteen year old girl, ending as a mermaid, and water spouts around her quite joyously. Occasionally, it wets the walls, and even the ceiling, but it is a pretty and original idea. The receptacle itself weighed nine tons —or something like that—and though I live in constant dread of it falling through into the basement, I am very fond of it. Sometimes, it

leaks, and refuses to be comforted, but when I do not turn it on, and decline to use it, it is quite well-behaved.

It looked so well that both architects were pleased, and disposed to regard it as their idea. Nevertheless, it was mine. Nobody else has a fountain. Of course, it is merely ornamental. Fish refuse to inhabit it, and nothing will grow in it. I always say that the splashing waters sound so refreshing, and cooling, and Oriental, but that is just a figure of speech. As a matter of fact, I am afraid to let the waters splash, for fear of leaks.

I LEARNED from vivid experience, that leaks are the only things that make commuters laugh. In the trains, I have said many amusing things, and told many witty stories, and nobody has smiled, but the first time I happened to remark that my roof was leaking, the entire car broke into uncontrollable mirth. To me, the leak was a frightful nuisance. It spoiled my walls, and its trickling kept me awake at night, but the commuters seemed to think it most engaging. They went into convulsions of laughter. They all had absurd theories and more absurd remedies, and they told me so many anecdotes about leaky roofs, that I was amazed. Evidently leakage is one of the beauties of the country.

In the city, nobody thinks about roofs. They

are there, just because they have to be there, but they never appear to cut up capers. In the realms of commutation, as soon as you own a roof, it leaks! I am told that you must expect it, and wait for it, and that it will never disappoint you. Architects are expert at construct-

ing leaky roofs. I suppose that rain is really no worse than ozone. In the country, you must anticipate both. The leaking roof puts money in circulation, at any rate. The plumber does the circulation.

My architect put a very handsome English fireplace in the hall. It pleased me immensely,

as it looked so cheerful. I pictured to myself the crackling logs in winter, as we gathered around the fireplace, and told ghost stories, or roasted chestnuts. You know what I mean. However, when I tried to put all that into execution, the whole place was enveloped in smoke. It was impossible to breathe. We had to throw open every window, and gasp! Then I was told that it was all due to a defective "flue." A flue is "a channel or passage for smoke or air," but my flue wasn't a channel or passage. In fact, it wasn't there at all. A very pretty stained glass window just above it had monopolized the channel or passage for smoke or air. Another dream vanished.

The fireplace is most artistic. Everybody who enters the hall, admires it. However, it is a fireplace that will not tolerate fire; it is just decorative. I felt very hurt about it, but I never said one word either to the him or the her-architect, because I felt perfectly certain that they would adduce fine reasons to prove that they had done the correct thing. They would have said something Tudor! When anybody

says anything Tudor to me, I am squelched. Merely to mention the Tudors gives me a pang. I have never disliked any family as intensely as I detest the Tudors, one and all. I certainly wish that my house had been built in William the Conqueror style, if he had any, and I dare-say he had. Those old kings lacked many things, but never style!

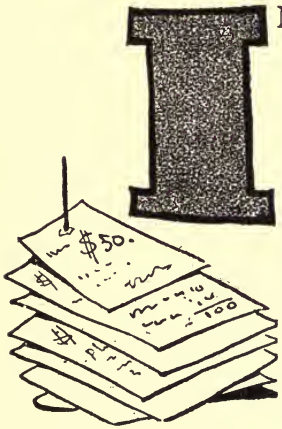
NO sooner was I ensconced in my residence (I have discovered that your new house becomes a "residence" after the first week, if all goes well) than many stolid, commercial people called, and asked me if I wanted my lawn "sodded." Such a thing had never occurred to me before. I supposed—at least I suppose I supposed—that lawns came already sodded. Otherwise one could scarcely call them lawns. What they alluded to as my lawn, looked like

a clay dump that had never had even a bowing acquaintance with grass. Then I realized that it was up to me to have it sodded. ("Sodded" sounds awfully wrong, but it isn't.) One brave sod-merchant offered to do the work for me for two hundred dollars, and he was extremely polite. I had arrived at the stage when I began to appreciate politeness. I told myself that I would sooner pay a little more for politeness, don't you know. Although politeness was not mentioned in my plans and specifications, it was most important.

I had spent so much money, and in such silly ways, that two hundred dollars seemed a mere drop in the bucket. I was about to close with the polite sod-purveyor, when a well-wisher (I seemed to be one weak mortal, completely surrounded by well-wishers) told me that I was being "done" and that two hundred dollars was an excessive price. I thought everything was excessive, so why single out the poor sod-chap to worry about?

My well-wisher said he hated to see me being imposed upon by every Tom, Dick and Harry,

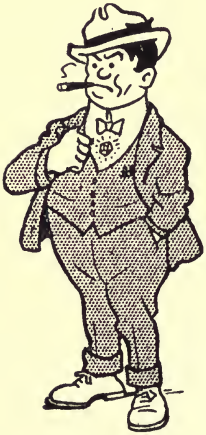
and that I was an easy mark. That I am sure I never was, because I always complained. I complained on general principles. I paid, but I complained. The upshot of it all was that my neighbour insisted upon taking the matter into his own hands, and that my lawn was beautifully sodded for twelve dollars. I had therefore saved one hundred and eighty-eight dollars on my lawn!



INSTEAD of being pleased at this marvellous stroke, I was irritated, for I imagined that I could have saved similar amounts on everything, including the fountain. This economy seemed to make me avaricious and extremely disagreeable. The germs of a dread suspicion were planted in my pellucid mind, never to be totally eradicated, and my beautiful trusting nature became obscured by gnawing doubts. For the

time being, I ceased to be a laughing lad, carolling a gay tra-la-la. The he and the she-architect loomed darkly, and I regarded my contractor as pernicious.

Later on I heard with fiendish glee that my contractor was very dissatisfied with his job which, he alleged, had proved to be much more costly than he had imagined. He declared that he was hopelessly swamped, and that he had lost money. I am sorry to say that this cheered me tremendously. It almost atoned for all the annoyances I had suffered, and it restored my peace of mind for a time. It was lovely to think that my residence had been such a source of vexation to a mere contractor. Nothing could ever induce him, he said to his pals, who then said it to me, to undertake such a job again—with the absurd Tudor windows, and the entrance hall, and all the curvatures.



I have since heard that contractors always lose money. In fact everybody seems to lose money, and I always wonder who finds it. That is the unexplained mystery.

I should like to add, and will add, that sometime before my house was ready for occupation, neither the he- nor the she-architect seemed to think me so droll. They had both ceased to laugh at my comedy, and had grown to regard me seriously. Even when I tried to amuse them, by saying very caustic things about the contractor, they refused to humour me. They grew very silent, and rather pensive. And now, when we meet, they scarcely recognize me. I am told that no human being has ever been known to bow to his architect after the house is finished. It is a sort of tacit agreement to let sleeping dogs lie. I am not quite sure whether the house-owners or the architects are the sleeping dogs.

The insinuation that the architect feels a bit sheepish about it all, I decline to credit. That would seem to infer that architects revelled in the finer feelings, which is of course absurd. I

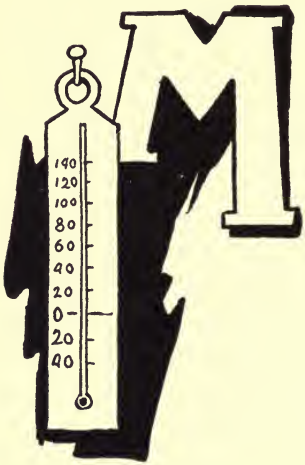
incline to the idea that after the house is finished, the architect murmurs: "The King is dead. Let's kill another." And then he proceeds to do it.

In his analysis of laughter, Professor Henri Bergson asks the following questions: "Why do we laugh at a head of hair which has changed from dark to blond? What is there comic about a rubicund nose? And why does one laugh at a negro?"

I can only reply to these queries by another: Why does one laugh at a commuter? Why has the commuter encroached upon the comic realms of the once-popular mother-in-law?

Before I joined the army of commuters, I was always vastly amused when I saw frantic human beings running to catch suburban trains,

as though their very lives depended upon it. Commuters! There seemed to be a sort of supercilious disdain about the very word. The commuter was a being who made frenzied efforts to escape from light, warmth, and life—particularly life—and rushed in agitation towards mud, gloom, and oppressive solitude. How very much more plausible it seemed to be trampled upon by gay, insouciant subway crowds, to be urged by altruistic "elevated" guards to "step lively"—to say nothing of "watch your step"—and to hang exultantly upon soft, germ-y straps, and sway rhythmically?



MY first experience with commuters in outgoing trains was something of a revelation. They appeared to be a race distinct, a race that had hitherto eluded me. Their very conversation amazed me. Usually in the metropolitan trains one listens to discussions on politics, or theatres, or vivid features of "the life." In the trains tending suburb-wards, nothing of the sort occurs. Men and women, boys and girls, appear to be immersed in eerie thoughts of—furnaces! The nice person on your right, holds forth very eloquently, on the superiority of steam heat to hot water, whilst the affable youth on your left, expatiates glowingly on the advantages of gas as a warmth dispenser.

They seem to dwell upon nothing but the vagaries of temperature, as though it were the

most entertaining topic in the world. They are all inclined to be inordinately argumentative, and each is anxious to talk rather than to listen. Even pretty girls who in the city, would be describing the latest styles of dance, are all agog

on the subject of temperature. Matrons large and stately, looking every inch the *grandes dames,* instead of emitting epigrams, as they surely would do in plays, wax plaintive as they discuss the *pros* and *cons* of their atmosphere.

Before I became a commuter, I used to whisper the word "cesspool" as a something inde-

scribably unpleasant. It seemed to me to suggest the very lowest depths of infamy and despair. I classed the "cesspool of wickedness" with the "sink of iniquity." There is no single "cuss word" that I would not sooner have uttered, than any allusion to such a painful idea as a cesspool.

Yet on the suburban trains, people talk blithely and even merrily of cesspools, as though they were rather stimulating affairs. You watch some unctuous and important person enter the train, and as he takes a seat beside some lavishly attired matron of imposing proportions, you hear him ask tenderly—yes, quite tenderly about those dreadful matters.

At first, I was appalled. It seemed so primitive, and so ingenuous, and so improper. Later on, of course, I was duly initiated, and now I am tremendously interested in cesspools. I have grown quite fond of them. I learned that in the suburbs, they behave strangely and expensively, and are constant sources of surprise —the sort of surprise that makes life joyous and nervous.

THE commuters on the trains are usually most serious. Humour is the one thing that they cannot, and will not tolerate. To look at their faces, you would imagine that they really hated getting home, and would be quite willing to undergo the agonies of slower transit—and sometimes they *do* undergo these agonies, willy-nilly. Nearly all of them carry parcels—not pleasantly constructed parcels that suggest the Fifth Avenue shops, but heavy, bulky, and pernicious affairs that to look at, call forth the unwilling perspiration.

These parcels they place wherever you want to sit, or walk. You tumble over them helplessly, and you find them jammed between you and your neighbour. Sometimes the bundles contain the luxury known as fertilizer.

That you can never mistake. People who carry fertilizer seem to be very proud of it, and anxious to flaunt it in your nostrils. Of course, you never object. You just sit there, awaiting arrival, and quite certain that if it be delayed, *you* will be fertilized.

In summer time, they carry large plants—the attributes of the "country" are usually bought in the city—and these they arrange so that they tickle you as you try to read your paper, carelessly, as it were.

Their favourite literature is that which deals with the garden, and with country homes, and occasionally they ask you a question or so, which you are unable to answer. Then you are regarded as ignorant, or stupid, and are left to contemptuous silence.

COMMUTERS never talk about the city, except in a most insulting way. How any human being could live in an apartment, in crowded residential sections, is something they can never understand. They look so haggard and so intensely miserable, as they insult the city, that you are astonished. Of course you would never dare to suggest that they are really longing to get back to the hubbub, and the moil of the metropolis, but—why *are* they so serious?

They chat in melancholy drab tones about the price of coal, and each seems to vie with the other, in the amount consumed. They discuss coal as though it were a classic. At first, it seems so strange that you can scarcely credit it. I never knew that coal had so many "quali-

ties." I had always thought that coal was just —coal. Well, it isn't. Often I have heard coal alluded to as though it were a most delicious table food. The commuters rave about its soft brightness, and its splendid durability. Frequently, I have imagined that they must serve it *a la maître d'hotel,* or *au gratin.* There is no commuterial theme of conversation so animated as that which deals with coal.

T my time of life, I really cannot grow wildly enthusiastic about kitchens. I say that in no superior tone, but rather reluctantly. Somehow or other, I have always regarded the kitchen as a place for the cook, when there *was* one, and for the prospective cook, when there wasn't. Women who would be described by graphically-penned reporters as "elegantly gowned" sit in these trains, and say all sorts of things about kitchens—really scurrilous things. I try to be sympathetic, and my strong point is listening, but it is difficult. Usually I endeavour to change the conversation to something more frivolous—cesspools, for instance—but then I am looked upon as "putting on airs."

The commuter *must* know all that there is to know about a kitchen, and I have never discov-

ered why. Kitchens are surely the study of a lifetime, for cooks, but I cannot cook, and I am willing to pay somebody who can. Surely, the kitchen is up to her! I am asked all about stoves, and ice-boxes, and utensils that are simply Greek to me, and it is baffling. I long for the strap in the subway, and for the "step-lively" tones of the conductor on the "elevated." I despise kitchens, and I am sorry I have one, and one with Tudor windows, too.

My kitchen is really very silly, because I never worried about it at all. My cooks always complain that they cannot turn round, and my rejoinder is invariably that I do not need revolving cooks. Imagine building a kitchen for the pleasure of watching cook turn round! It is absurd. However, my kitchen is distasteful to any woman who has housewifely perceptions, and women without those perceptions, never look at it. The icebox is situated directly over the furnace, and only the iceman profits by that. It is very cold in winter, and fearfully hot in summer—and so on. When I tell the commuters all that, they are not in the least

amused. They could not possibly be more serious if I confessed that I had murdered all my relatives, and intended to murder theirs, too.

They have no sense of humour. If I can laugh about my kitchen, why shouldn't they? Apparently they regard me as an escaped lunatic, and sometimes, they "avert their faces" (as Laura Jean would say) as though I were beneath contempt. I suppose I am, but in the city nobody would think of letting me insist upon it. In the city, if I said: "I know I'm a lunatic" people would put me at my ease, and exclaim, "Oh, not at all." But in the country, they seriously agree, and of course it is annoying.

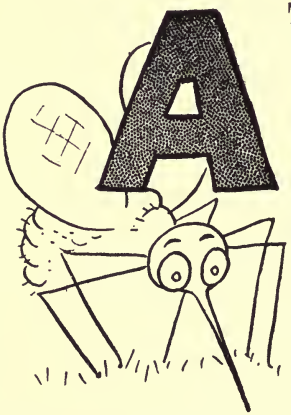
AS for succeeding in "putting over" a feeble joke or so, as you are commuting homewards, that is out of the question. Life is real, and life is earnest, in the suburbs, and everybody is going home, either to turn on the heat, or to turn it off. Temperature, at any rate, is the goal of the trip. Oh, how they love thermometers! Nothing else matters much. At first, I was always gay and debonair (isn't *debonair* a lovely word?) and had something lightly jocular to say to each neighbour. But not now! I have learned my lesson, and if I cannot talk furnace, I am silent. Sometimes they speak optimistically about the purity, and the excellence of the air, in an almost intoxicated manner. They seem to be drunk with air. They all appear to sleep with quantities of windows wide open, and to regret

that they cannot open their roofs. I daresay that some of them can and do. Leaky roofs, I should think, would be easy to open. After all, air is air, isn't it? If they looked radiantly healthy and youthful, I wouldn't say a word, but some of them are so frightfully wan-looking, and so worried, and so distraught.

I often think that if they slept with all their windows closed, hermetically sealed from the air, they would look infinitely better. Air *does* make one look awfully weather-beaten, don't you think? The country air seems to give one a varicose expression, if I may use such a term. The people who breathe the nice air of the city, without bothering about its quality, seem so much more radiant.

To utter such a sentiment on a suburban train, would be fatal. You must humour the commuters and discuss air from their stand-

point. They grow to be excessively egotistical. That is part of life in the suburbs. Sometimes they ask you a question, but if you imagine that they wait for the answer, you are mistaken. The question merely leads to dissertations on their own well-being, their furnaces, their ice-boxes, their coal, and their war against draughts.



AT first I used to try to draw them out on the subject of mosquitoes. The topic fascinated me, as a novice. I soon gave that up. It is a very dangerous theme to dwell upon. No symptom of humour lurks in it. The commuter will admit the presence of mosquitoes in New Jersey, *if* he lives on Long Island, and on Long Island, *if* he lives in New Jersey. The mosquito is never where he happens to hang out. Never. I proudly admit

and I am not a bit ashamed of it, that I have been mosquito-bitten to the verge of lunacy, in my honeysuckle home on Long Island, but I have never discovered another sufferer.

"I sit on my porch night after night," says one, "and I don't know what a mosquito means."

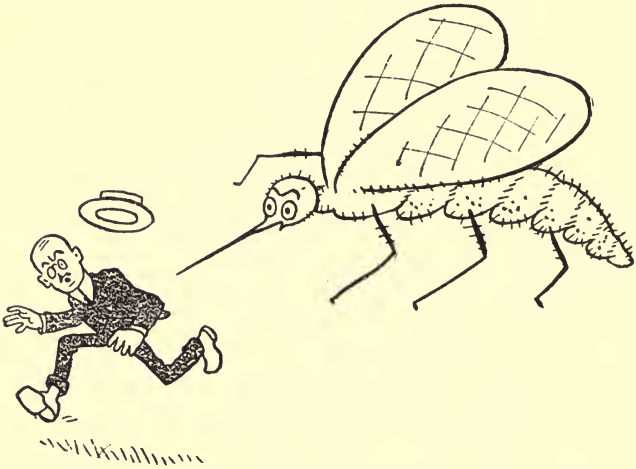
"I always smile at suggestions of mosquitoes," purrs another, "because I've never even seen such a thing. What is it?"

Liars!

Each of them is, in the language of Mr. Shakespeare, "like one, who having unto truth, by telling of it, made such a sinner of his memory, to credit his own lie." The agent who sold me my land, was a nice cheerful liar of this brand. I happened to say—for the sake of making agreeable conversation—that I sincerely trusted there were no mosquitoes on Long Island and he looked at me in bewilderment. What an actor!

"Mosquitoes!" he exclaimed, as though I had hurt him to the very quick. "Oh, I can assure you that there is no such plague here."

I glanced up at the wall of the station where we held this conversation, and lo! right before my eyes, and his sat six fat, malicious, winking, triumphant, and sinister mosquitoes, awaiting their prey. Actually, I believe that one of them



laughed, and that another buzzed an epigram. It was a tense moment. Do you think that the agent was nonplussed? Not a bit of it. He remarked, simply, pellucidly, but seriously: "Oh, I suppose that people brought those down with them. It often happens, you know."

The commuter never admits a mosquito. He hears perhaps, that numbers of them have been observed—if mosquitoes are ever observed—on Riverside Drive, and that Central Park is alive with them, but Long Island—never. Once or twice, I ventured, in my silly humorous way, to ask why, if there were no mosquitoes, all the houses were screened, and so many people were perceived buying mosquito netting. I was at once squelched. People were screened on account of flies. Flies were such a nuisance—but not much more so in the country than in the city. People in the country merely protected themselves, and in the city, they gave the flies full scope.

ONCE become a commuter, and you will acquire the art of lying as it can never be acquired elsewhere. You will acquire it as an art. It *is* an art. In the country, you *must* lie, or people will wonder why you live there. Commuters lie to themselves, and lie to each other. It is one of the essentials of suburban life. At first it is difficult—everything worth while is difficult. You may have recollections of an early education that regarded lying as a pestiferous habit. There used to be some sort of idea to that effect —early-Victorian, I believe. (No I should not set it down as Tudor; the Tudors have enough to account for.)

When you commute, you will rectify all that. You will discover that in the first place, it is agreeable to lie, and in the second place, that it is rather inspiring to lie better than your

neighbour. The man who can tell the most spectacular "whopper," is the fellow who is most respected on the trains. He is looked up to. He is pinnacled. He is dominant. He is an authority. He is worth studying, emulating, and honouring.

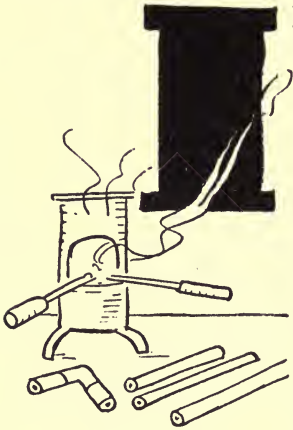
I am a much better liar than I used to be, I am glad to say. At first, I thought I should never succeed. The task seemed to be beyond me. It was gigantic, and there was so much competition. The supply of liars seems to be even greater than the demand. However, I gave myself up to it, and I can lie as well as many of them.

In time, you grow awfully fond of lying. There is something exhilarating about it. It fascinates. It is as enlivening as any game, and you never lose your temper, as you do at bridge. Once start as a liar, and you will never willingly give it up.

I TELL the commuters (when they give me a chance to lift up my voice in speech, which they do, seldom and grudgingly) that I walk for miles before breakfast, drinking in the pure matutinal air, which I consider a most abominable pastime; that I sleep on an ozone porch, which is to me inconceivable; that my servants (who are always leaving because they cannot endure the country) are so attached to my household, that they cannot be induced to go out even for a stroll, and simply love their home; that I listen to the rural noises of the neighbourhood, and am entranced at the barking of dogs, the bedlam of cats, and the eternal "music" of the dear little birds. I daresay they know I am lying, and appreciate my art, and as they do it so admirably themselves, they

are in a position to judge the special quality of my mendacity.

Actors, journalists, artists, and all sorts of professional people travel by the commuters' trains. They are immediately reduced to a common denominator. No sooner do they enter the trains, than they lose their characteristics, and become amalgamated with the crowd. The actors talk dramatically of their furnaces; the journalists gloat over their splendid heating systems, and the artists paint in glowing colours, the beauty of their water pipes. One actor, Mr. Frank Craven, actually dramatized the whole thing, and made a success of the oddity of it all. Later on, his sense of humour will be obscured, for all these things make for the ineffable gloom of life.



I HAVE omitted one topic of conversation that prevails to a remarkable extent. It is not gay; it is not poetic; it is not sparkling; but it is humanitarian, at least. I refer to the plumber. The plumber is one of many suburban tragedies, and he gives a continuous performance. His vagaries furnish delightful sources of intermittently glorious experiences. Some say haughtily, that the plumber is a parasite, but that means nothing. We are all parasites, more or less.

The plumber, it is alleged, lives and thrives on the carelessness and the exquisite nonchalance of builders and contractors. He grows fat and very prosperous on their peccadilloes. All commuters will tell you hair-raising stories of plumbers and their apparently nefarious acts.

The suburban plumber is a curious person, whose main business in life seems to me to be luncheon. You send for him in a moment of aberration, and desperation, and he appears in due course with his train of satellites. No sooner has he diagnosed your case, and told you to hope for the worst, than off he goes to luncheon with his associates. They lunch persistently for an hour or two, charging you of course, for all the time they expend upon their nourishment, and when they return, it is almost time for them to go to dinner.

Their job appears to be an easy one, for it consumes little time, and calls for no particular material. But when the bills come in—and they never fail, and are never a day late—you are appalled at the tremendous technicality of it all. A faucet may cost five cents, but it has coyly demanded the labour of five men, for five hours each. It is a sum in

multiplication, and you pay the demnition total.

You learn from your plumber's bill that he has supplied you with such delicatessen as a "flange union" a "flange union washer" a few "steam ells" some "clean out screws," and so on. These cost next to nothing, but at the end of the statement, you discover a delicate, reluctant little item called "Time." The time costs eight dollars—just like that, and you realize that you have paid for the plumber's luncheon.

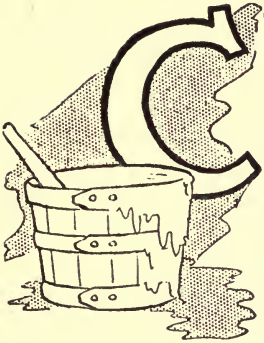
NOBODY has ever seen a plumber lunch—at least I have never discovered anybody who has enjoyed that fervid experience. Nobody has ever learned where he lunches, or any particulars anent his habits. Several times I have made up my mind to follow him, just for the sake of the experience, but he has always eluded me. I can go through a course luncheon in an hour,

including the gentle dalliance with coffee, and cigarettes, but my plumbers cannot manage it in less than two hours, and when they return, I fancy that they sit and talk it all over, criticising the food, and the cooking. Perhaps they describe their gastronomic sensations. Anyway, I always pay for the time, and I never knew before, that so much vacant time existed on this planet.

Commuters love plumber discussions, and each goes the other one better. As for women, they adore the topic, and you must admit that it *is* dainty, and full of literary significance. Plumbers have a positive mania for being paid, and absolutely refuse to plumb for people who permit their bills to accumulate. They are most punctilious. I have said that I should like to see the plumber's lunch that I

pay for, but I think I should prefer to see that which the plumber pays for. To compare the two would be delightful. Never attempt to reason with a plumber. He will floor you every time. He will murmur "flange union" or "steam ells" and then you are done. I used to argue. Now I merely pay. I positively refuse to have flange unions, and steam ells hurled at me. It is unfair, as I have nothing to hurl back. I am unprepared, as it were.

Then you never know when you will need him again. He is incessant; in fact, I think that every new householder should keep a plumber on the premises. He should have his own little room, fitted up comfortably. He should live with you, and then you *could* study his luncheon.

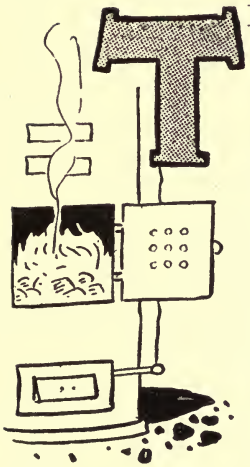


COMMUTERS chat a good deal about cement, too. I hardly knew what cement was, when I first joined the army. I merely thought of it as something sticky, rather like mucilage. The commuters talk about it as though it were velvet, or a precious stone. They realize its varieties, and they revel in them. They seem to cement everything. Sobbingly, sometimes, they tell you about the cracking of their cement, and ask for your sympathy. There is nothing so sad in life, as the cracking of cement. It was, however, with something akin to amazement, that I heard the curious query: "Has your house settled?"

Really, I resented that, as foolish humour. How *could* a house be settled when its owner was so conspicuously *un*-settled? However, I felt convinced that there was something subtly suburban about the interrogation. And that

was surely the case. In the country, all new houses settle. That is to say, they acclimatize themselves, as it were, and grow used to their surroundings.

Whilst settling, huge cracks appear in the walls, fissures open in the woodwork, and you hear alarming creakings usually at the dead of night. The house is settling. It is most unpleasant. You try to live placidly during the process. You are warned never to paper the walls, or indulge in interior decoration, until your abode is comfortably settled. An unsettled house is extremely uncanny, but most ordinary. The house, as a rule takes a much longer time to settle than you do. It goes about it deliberately, as though it disliked settling exceedingly, and preferred to sow its wild oats, and go the pace. It hates to be broken in, and to take root. Of course, the poor thing knows that it can never move again, and that there it must stay until it is finally demolished. So under the circumstances, I suppose it is only natural that houses settle slowly.



THERE is nothing like commuting for getting people out of their cosy little grooves. You simply wallow in novel experiences and eccentric thoughts. There is never a suggestion of poetry that you used to imagine was inseparable from the country. Nobody ever speaks of balmy fragrance, and twittering birds, and the thousand odours of flowers. Nothing like that, I assure you. Once mention flowers, and cement is hurled at your head, and you are asked impudent questions about your "dampers." I would sooner deal with trigonometry, conic sections, and differential calculus, than dampers. Even the word is depressing. I studied dampers, and I failed ignobly. You may not know it, and I hope you don't, but it is by dampers that your furnace is regulated. Mine was irregulated by them.

My dampers have always and I am perfectly certain, will always take all the heat out of my house, and throw it away. My heat is cast to the four winds—I think there are five on Long Island—and the dampers are responsible. Everybody understands dampers except me, and I never shall. I am fairly intelligent; I am extremely energetic; I am enthusiastic, and full of the joy of life, but I shall never understand dampers. I look upon them as immoral and disgusting.

Commuters can talk dampers by the hour, and they do. They all have the very latest kind which seem to be as intricate as the workings of a watch. Most of their lives appear to be spent in the cultivation of their dampers, and what they do in summer, when the dampers take a vacation I have not discovered.

Whenever I get a new man—that is to say, about once a month—he asks me to explain the dampers to him, and when I tell him that I cannot do it, he evidently regards me as an imbecile. I have come to the conclusion that perhaps he is right. I tell him to work it out for

himself, and in a week or so, he informs me that he has done it. He has, and the heat continues to leave the house. The more coal he plunges into the voracious furnace the more we freeze.

Of course I do not tell the commuters all that. On the contrary, I perpetrate gorgeous stories of the wonderful results my dampers achieve. They are green with envy. I enlarge upon the terrific heat from which I suffer on the coldest day—all with a few handfuls of coal—and they are highly entertained. Commuters expect lies, and as far as I am concerned, they are never disappointed. Baron Munchausen must have been the original commuter. Yet I fancy that I have often outdone the Baron.

AS soon as you own your own house, you begin to think envyingly of the simple, happy, jocund days, when you lived in some other fellow's, and *he* did the worrying. Ah, those bland and innocuous days! Life was all beer and skittles, and you didn't know it.

The suburban well-wishers are always at you to "improve" your property—and please note that it is invariably called "property." Personally, I hate the word. It has such an avaricious, miserly, and sordid sound. The commuter always talks glibly of "my property" and asks you about "your property." It used to annoy me dreadfully, and I often wondered why such people did not speak of being "at property" instead of "at home," and why the popular song's title was not changed to "Prop-

erty, Sweet Property" for the benefit of the commuter.

The first improvement I was begged to make, was suggested when I spoke harshly of my coal bills, and referred feelingly to the cold. That, I may add, was before I had learned to emulate the example of Baron Munchausen. Oh, I was very *naïf* at first.

"You need storm windows," said the commuter. "Nobody can possibly live in the country without storm windows."

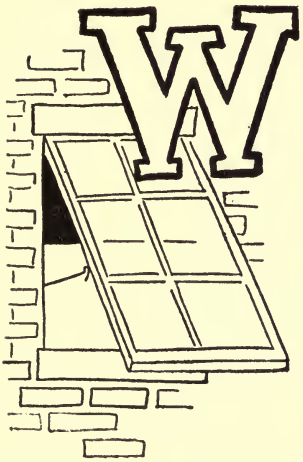
Now, I rather liked the idea of storm windows. They sounded so Russian, and so pleasant, and there was a suggestion of solidity about them that was not without appeal. Country "property" is so fragile, and you frequently feel that you are camping out, rather than living.

"With storm windows," continued my friend, "you will be so warm that no change in the weather will affect you, and your coal bills will be reduced by a little matter of five or six tons."

Others implored me to use storm windows,

and conveyed the impression that they would make life one glad song. I longed to sing it. I am not a bit self-opinionated, and listen to everybody, even when everybody has something different to urge. In this case, there was a general outburst in favour of storm windows.

So I had them placed everywhere. Mine not to reason why. I had some that would open, and some that wouldn't. I had some that suggested the sealing of sardines in their cosy little boxes, and some that permitted ventilation. They made the "property" look quite opulent, and I felt quite proud of them. Came winter!



WHEN people talk of storm windows to me today, I could stone them. On the subject I really think that I am not quite sane. No sooner did I start life, thoroughly and consistently storm-windowed, than slowly, and surely we began to freeze. Never have I experienced such pervasive cold. It simply wouldn't get out of the house. It couldn't. There was no way of egress. The storm windows kept it in, and made a prisoner of it. It never had one day out—not even a Sunday. The cold stayed with us, and defied us, and wouldn't be persuaded to run out for a little change. It always seemed much warmer outside than inside. The cold clung to us like ivy, or moon-vine.

You can believe me or not, but I assure you

that my coal bills ran up to such an alarming figure that I was baffled. All we did, was to pile on coal and freeze. The storm windows seemed to have entered into collusion with the dampers. They were mute and defiant, standing like sentinels over the weather. The atmosphere of the rooms never varied. It was always stagnantly wintry.

I explained all this to my commuter friends, and they evidently thought that I was mad! They refused to smile. They shook their heads dolorously, and appeared to murmur: "Poor fellow! Poor fellow!"

"It stands to reason—" each began.

Perhaps it did. I do not attempt to explain the thing. I merely say what I know to be the truth. The storm windows did not keep out the cold. They kept it *in*. I admit that they looked very well indeed, and that everybody admired them. They were handsome and they were expensive, but *I* think they are meant for summer when you do not want the cold to leave you. My idea of storm windows is that they

should be put up in summer, and taken down in winter.

Then you need competent men to put them up and take them down unless you happen to be born handy, and can do little stunts like that for yourself. I was not thus born. I mention that fact sorrowfully. It is my misfortune that I can do nothing in the least useful, and am notoriously un-manual. As for competent men, they are lacking in the country. They do not like the suburbs, and are not to be lured there. They herd in cities, and reserve their competency for big towns. So what are you to do? The only hope is to be storm-windowed for life. Or, un-storm-windowed!

WHEN you have property, you must be practical, and mechanical. Otherwise, you are in a perpetual quandary.

Have you ever heard of that little delicacy known as garbage? There was a time when I should have hesitated to discuss such a subject. It has a squalid and nauseating sound. But in the country, people chat about it, as though it were a new work by a popular author. It is something that collects about every house. It is the uneatable part of eatable things. For instance, orange peel and potato skins are garbage. They collect. Pleasant men call and remove them. These agreeable gentlemen are known as garbage men.

When you are plentifully stocked with servants, you wot nothing of garbage. It is mercifully kept from you. In the life of every com-

muter, comes a drear, drab, and morbid moment when he is *not* well-stocked with servants. In fact, he is not stocked at all. Your cook may love you, but there comes a day when she tells you that she can never be yours. This happens, and *must*. It is inevitable. It is life— which is just one damned cook after another.

My first experience with garbage came at one of these cookless moments. The garbage was in a heavy can, or receptacle, and it had to be taken out so that the garbage person could annex it, and take it home. I am no snob. I am the most democratic kind of individual, but I will confess that the idea of rolling a garbage can out in full view of the assembled multitude—and fellow commuters seem to spend their lives watching your every movement—did not appeal to me in the least. It seemed such a silly game. It had to be rolled down a long cement walk, and carefully rolled

too. I could not make up my mind to do it, and yet—

A dreadful idea of eating the garbage, and ridding myself of it in that way took possession of me. Dogs and cats like it, and I dare-

say that I could train myself to a course of garbage eating. However, there was no time for that.

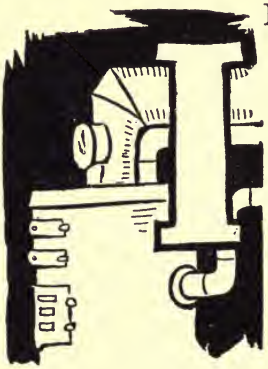
Furtively I glanced around to see that I was not observed. I analysed the adjacent windows, to see that there were no Peeping Toms.

In my youthful, impecunious days, I behaved in a like manner before I dared to enter the salvation-giving pawn-shop. The entire populace always appeared to be waiting for me—just for *me*.

Finally the coast seemed clear, and with one brave movement, I started the garbage can on its course. Never have I felt so foolish, as on that occasion. Running after a garbage can is such a futile pastime. It gained headway as it reached the slope, and I did a Marathon after it. Stray dogs and cats stood and looked at me, waiting for me to release it. The dogs had a sort of satirical look upon their faces, and the cats just sat on their haunches and enjoyed themselves. Nobody gave me a helping hand, but as I reached destination, I heard a hearty and detestable "Ha! Ha! Ha!" from an adjoining house. Perhaps I had been snap-shotted, for a series of sketches exactly like these!

I beat a hasty retreat, and paused only when I was safely inside, to mop my perspiring brow, and to curse garbage and everything appertaining thereto. Some day an inspired person will

invent garbage-less food, and we shall be saved from the horror. Do they have it in the city? Oh, I suppose so, but one never hears of such things in populous towns—or at least, I never did. I had to go to the trouble of owning my own house, to learn lessons of that ilk.



IN the country, one has scarcely time to live one's life comfortably. Something is always happening to one's "property." It is impossible to read, or to write with tranquillity, as grave things are scheduled to occur if you are not on the alert.

For instance I was told that unless I had a safety valve on my hot water tank, it would explode during the night, and we should all be blown into eternity. I should much have preferred such an explosion to take place during the day, but daytime was never mentioned. The calamity would occur at night. It made me

feel very apprehensive. Each night I retired firmly convinced that some dread catastrophe would occur. I sent for one of my lunch-eating plumbers, who told me not to worry, and that a valve was not in the least necessary. Again I was warned by the original well-wisher, and again I communed with the plumber. He seemed quite hurt, and inclined to be haughty, as though he could not bear to have his word doubted. Although he could have spent six happy hours putting on that valve, and eating his luncheon, he hem'd and ha'd about it so that I could see he did not want the job, and I let him go.

Night after night, I thought I heard the beginning of the explosion—the premonitory rumbling, so to speak. I reckoned out how long it would be before summer made the tank unnecessary, and in my bedstead I did sums that kept me awake and nervous. It was most dispiriting, but I am bound to say that nothing has happened so far, and—I touch wood!

ONE cannot get away from the things that happen in the country. There is no deliverance. Gay theatre-people—those who usually talk quite exclusively about their wonderful success on the stage, and their "big hits," and all that sort of thing, drop in occasionally, for they are my neighbours. Apparently, they are hypnotized by suburban life, for they can talk of nothing else. They make, post-haste, for furnaces, and plumbers and leaks.

One lovely girl, prominent in Ziegfeld's Follies, with whom I have often discussed the temptations of the stage—she was tempted, but she did *not* fall—and the delights of pure art, with other topics of the healthy Sunday

newspaper variety, actually seems to forget them all in the country as she chats blithely about weather strips, and screens. I have seen that girl effulgent in silkiest of tights, and marvellous non-clothes, and yet in my house, she can wax eloquent on nothing but material suburbanism. The country is the great leveller.

She has some contrivance by means of which, she can regulate the heat in *her* house by clock-work. From her own boudoir, she says, she can touch a handle, and drive the temperature in any direction she chooses. I try to change the subject with which I am so fed-up, and I suggest all sorts of theatre gossip, but she is adamant. She is completely wedded to her home—her "property." She is almost savage about it. I can imagine her growling, if it were pulled away from her. It is amazing.

A well-known star actor, who was once a member of Augustin Daly's company, and who can usually talk by the hour (and loves to do it) on the subject of Daly's magnificent discipline, the like of which we never see today, is metamorphosed, as soon as he reaches the suburbs. He forgets Daly and art, and discipline, and present day inferiority, and compares hot water heat with steam. You cannot drag him away from the topic. He is a changed man as soon as he is near his "property." He snarls, if you grow inattentive.

RTISTS who should love the country because it is beautiful, and inspiring forget pencil, paint, and brush, and revel in builders, and taxes, and soil. They seem to lack all other ideas. I have tried to emulate the example of all these metamorphosed ones, but without the slightest success. Really nice people, with minds, become infected with suburbanism, and give it full scope. Sometimes, in their midst, I make up my mind to dwell on my furnace, to revel in my dampers, and to browse in my leaks, but I must say that they are not deeply interested in my effort. They do not seem to realize that I am doing it for their sake.

They are not anxious to hear me talk. They much prefer that I should listen. They adore their experiences, and they love everything they

have. They are the greatest optimists I have ever met.

If I complain of the cold, they insist that they have never felt it, and they always swelter. If I protest against the heat, they always sleep under blankets—always! That sleeping under blankets infuriates me more than anything else. Why I have met commuters in the train, after I have spent a sleepless night due to the parching heat, and they—they have slept under blankets. It is impossible to argue about it, and very rude to tell them that you don't believe them. They have not invited you to look at them under their blankets. You were not there when they retired, and they know it! They have you! Either you must cast doubts on their veracity, or you must let them think that you believe them. It is a cowardly thing to say that you sleep under blankets.

Sleeping under blankets is one of the favourite sports of the country. It sounds so comfortable and so superior. Commuters tell it all over the city, and there at least, they are credited by the unfortunate sufferers—and envied. How

they rub it in! On the very worst nights, when you read that people positively refuse to go home, and prefer to cast their exhausted bodies on the sands of Coney Island, and everybody talks of wilted collars, and drooping spirits, and even the horses fall in their traces, and dogs go mad, and the world seethes, the commuters appear to announce that *they* slept under blankets.

As I have insinuated elsewhere, I have become a Munchausen, and have lost all regard for the truth, but I simply could not tell wilted people that I had slept under blankets—even if I had! I wouldn't do it for gold. It would be cruel. I find that the heat in the country is a little worse than the heat in the city, where the houses are at least solid. I could not bring myself to tell poor city people that I was immune from their sufferings.

It is the joy of the commuter to boom his property. He does it in the most brazen manner, and I—well, I am "on to him" if I may use such an expression. It is the same with the cold. In the country, he never feels it, whilst

in the city—to which he would never, never return—he freezes. The city is impossible.

Of course it is a delightful frame of mind; so new-thought-y, and nice.

COMMUTERS all love the frightful walk from the station to their "property." They talk of it affectionately, and linger over it longingly. In summer they are anxious to fill their lungs with the pure ozone, and in winter, it is the "blow" that fascinates them. I hurry to get my walk over as soon as I can—I even count in order to make the time pass quickly—though I always say that I adore it, as they do. What is the use of being eccentric, and posing as "not like other commuters"?

Certainly they never look as though they enjoyed their walk, as they tramp—tramp over the marshy ground. If you happened to suggest

that the walk is rather trying in all weather, they would be up in arms immediately, and on the defensive. They would resent your sympathy intensely, and insist upon regarding that walk as one of the many joys of suburban life.

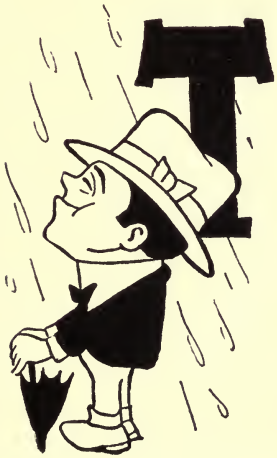
I have said that I pretend to take long walks before breakfast, for the sake of Munchausening. Some commuters actually do it, and expatiate upon the beauty of the early morning country. Thank goodness, I cannot argue about that, as I have never seen it. I daresay that it is everything it is cracked up to be—and perhaps more—but I am not morbid. Once or

twice I have strolled to the village to buy the morning papers before breakfast, and it has quite upset me for the entire day. The country may be beautiful, but it is much more so after an egg. People who take long walks before breakfast always seem to me perverse and extremely disagreeable. They are argumentative, and aggressive, and full of moods. I think that, as a relaxation, the early morning walk, must be most disturbing. Why rush anything?

If these early morning walkers were compelled to indulge in that exercise, they would protest vehemently, but they do love to hear themselves talk, and this matutinal promenade is such a fertile theme.

"I take my dogs out for an early morning walk" one commuter always tells me, and he seems quite proud of himself, and his exploit. I wouldn't treat *my* dogs like that, and I don't believe that they would put up with it anyway. The poor dumb animals cannot tell you how they hate it, and how thoroughly it gets on their nerves. I daresay that they bark, in their artless canine way, but the commuter thinks that

everything is as optimistic as he pretends to be. It is a commendable pose. I have often thought of writing to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, when I have heard of the poor dogs being trotted out for long arid walks before breakfast.



THE commuter likes rain; he likes drought; he likes sun; he likes clouds. There is nothing he doesn't like, except the city, and as he spends most of his time there, and when he isn't there, is always running in to dine and to amuse himself, it is very strange to me. He adores the loneliness of the country, but you see him almost breaking his neck to catch a train and get away from it. He can dwell by the hour on the alluring silences of the suburbs, but he is always in a turmoil to get to Broadway, which he despises.

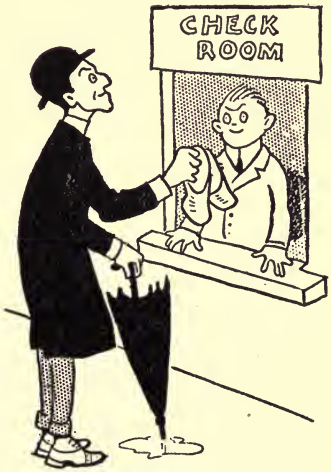
Perhaps he is anxious to mortify his spirit. Who knows? He hates asphalt, but as he checks his eternal rubbers at the station, you notice that he grows alert, and that he smiles!

No commuter has told me up to the present,

that he is happiest in rubbers, but it would not surprise me a bit if he did. I should regard such confidence as another link in the Munchausen chain. You see, the country has a knack of staying wet for a long time—just to be different. When the city smiles, and is sun-

kissed, your property is damply conditioned, and you wear rubbers. At first, you rebel, but you wear them.

Snow that falls pleasantly in March may—I say *may*—stay in the country until the Fourth of July. Snow really *does* love the country, and cannot make up its mind to leave it. There is no mere "week-end" business about snow. Nobody bothers about it, or tries to entertain it. It lies there *perdu,* as they say in romance, and just rots gradually, and you—you wear rubbers to wade through it. Rubbers become part of your life. You really never feel quite dressed until you have donned your rubbers. The rubber-less commuter experiences a naked sensation.



I have tried to draw out the commuter on the

subject of rubbers, but he is mute! Perhaps it is too solemn a thought for casual use.

He has not yet reached the new-thought pinnacle from which he can exclaim enthusiastically: "Oh, I just adore my dear rubbers." Later on, he will do that, I am sure. There will come a time, when he will murmur: "I cannot bear to go to the city, because I shall be obliged to take off my rubbers. It is so horrible to walk without them."

SORTING out one's neighbours, when one has any, and sorting out other people's, when one hasn't, seem to be two of the most fascinating indoor sports that the country has to offer. It is very soothing, and restful. It is always surprising to me that real estate people never make any specialty of neighbours. These are never

mentioned, and yet they are extremely important. I don't see why such advertisements as "a fine line of lively neighbours" or "a set of particularly respectable neighbours," or "guaranteed neighbours" or "carefully prepared neighbours" should not be exceedingly inviting.

Some—myself for example—might feel attracted towards a puzzle in neighbours, a riddle, as it were, good for the long winter evenings, as a respite from the furnace. Often it is exhilarating to arrange the relationships, and make weird guesses. In the country, one can hear one's neighbours very plainly, and the real estate people might attract clients, by offers of "amusingly quarrelsome neighbours" or "archly romantic neighbours" or "mysterious neighbours." Most neighbours *are* mysterious, and I admire them for it.

The topic is avoided, for some reason or

other, and you find yourself housed, and in the midst of the totally unexpected, which is exasperating. Fortunately, the village tradespeople are there, always willing to give you full particulars, to the best of their ability. They are very useful. The iceman is always pleasantly loquacious; the grocer knows everybody's business, and the baker, in times of stress, will help you out. These people play important parts in the life of the suburbs.

Do you remember the good old story of the new arrivals, who were particularly anxious to discover the history of their next door? This seemed impossible, until they bethought themselves of the garbage man, who was most agreeable, and friendly. They decided to ask him, and they did it. He listened to the plaintive query, and scratched his head in perplexity. Apparently he was in deep meditation for a few minutes.

"I don't know nothin' particler about 'em" he said at last, "but I can say that they have awful swell swill."

HEN I moved to the suburbs, the thought of neighbours, and their exigencies never occurred to me. If it had done so, I think I should have had the family pedigree pasted upon the front door, so as to avoid any suspicion, and the contents of the household clearly set forth. It would have saved so much trouble. You settle in a small town, and forget that unless your neighbours know all that there is to know (and perhaps a little more) they will regard you as mysterious. They will believe the best about you until they know the worst. That is suburban human nature, and very commendable. In the city, it is slightly different. There they believe the worst about you until they know the best.

Your cook (if she stays with you more than

a day) will be of some use. She will inform your neighbours' cook (if *theirs* stays with them more than a day) all that it is undesirable they should know. This will facilitate things materially, and make life pleasant. However,

you soon accumulate a series of precious facts, and can do what you like with them. You learn that the commuter you meet every night at the same time, is a consistent church-goer; that another is married to his third wife; that a third has just mortgaged the family homestead; that

a fourth lives extravagantly, and owes for everything, and that a fifth cannot keep a servant for more than a few hours. It takes a little time to digest these tremendously valuable details. They should of course be patent at once —yours, with the house!

It is important to know how many dogs your neighbour keeps, and whether he owns a piano or a victrola; if he revels in week-end parties, and what are his politics. In town, you don't care a hang, but in the suburbs you discover that these things are part and parcel of your existence. You can be quite certain that your nicest traits will be unregistered, whilst your pet skeleton will be trotted out in all its nudity. You may chat affably with all sorts of commuters on the way home, but you feel tolerably certain that their wives have discovered your

foibles, and your acquaintance goes no further. The most amicable commuters go quietly and separately to their respective homes, and there they end as far as you are concerned. It is very quaint. You call him "Bill"—provided he be named William—on the train, but when you see him with his wife, you bow coldly. So does he. The atmosphere is frigid.

A wife seems to spring up in the most unexpected places for each commuter. The lively chap who smokes all the way home, and laughs with each Tom, Dick and Harry, is usually saddled with a perfectly inappropriate better half. He greets her seriously, as he skips out of the train. She has been riding in the non-smoker. They depart together, and you are left!

MOST people in the country are so busy owning their own homes that they have little time for recreation. Owning one's home is a fearfully arduous pursuit. In time, every home-owner becomes a crank, and cannot escape it. He is always fidgeting about paint, or cement, or heat, or screens, and he has no time to enjoy himself. As soon as he reaches his home, he starts to bother, and after dinner, he is tired out. To be sure, there is the attractive game of bridge. Bridge levels everything, and that is its great charm. It is the one occupation for which no references are necessary. If you want a "fourth"—and you always do—you want him badly. You ask no questions. I have wanted a fourth so badly, that I would

have accepted a murderer, an embezzler, or a white slaver, without a comment.

They play bridge in the country, and the fourth is in great request. It would pay some enterprising chap to advertise himself as a fourth for would-be bridge games. The fourth is quite as difficult to secure in the country, as in the city. You hunt for him, high and low, and you feel immensely grateful to him, when you rout him out. I don't see why the suburban hackman, or the telegraph boy, or the drug-store youth, does not qualify as a fourth. I often wonder why lads are not brought up as fourths, to go through life in perpetual request. If I had to begin life again, I honestly think it would be as a fourth. Everybody smiles at the fourth; his welcome is assured; he is never *de trop;* he is the "one thing needful," and life for him is a constant joy.

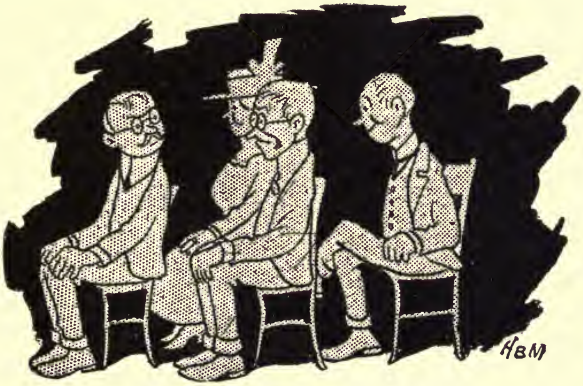
Bridge opens many doors for you. You tell your commuter friends on the train that you "play at" bridge (have you noticed that everybody "plays at" bridge?) and lo! the pleasure of your company is requested immediately. There are no questions asked. You may be quite disreputable, you may be absolutely outside the pale, but if you play bridge, you need not fear. Will you make a fourth?

BRIDGE and golf will do a great deal for you in the suburbs. I am sorry to say that I do not play the latter. Most people, I am told, play it for the sake of being in the air. I find that in the country I can be in the air, anyway; in fact, I have to be in the air; therefore I do not play golf. Please think pleasantly of me, in spite of that dread confession. I *do* play bridge; that is to say, I "play at" it.

The great thing in the country is, of course, to forget the horrors of the home that you own. As I said before, that is often impossible. However, people make valiant efforts to get away from their terrifying ownership. There is the inevitable picture-house, in which you can

view all the elderly, and over-ripe pictures that have forgotten their own releases. The village picture house is agreeable, and extremely democratic. Usually you sit next to your own cook, who is seeking respite and recreation. In front of you is the plumber whose bill is still unpaid, but who is very affable, and not at all vindictive. At the back of you is the hackman with

whom you have waged a bitter quarrel. All is forgotten in the pictorial joys of "Why Girls Leave Home" or "The Price of Her Honour." It is a mixed assemblage, but it takes you away from home for a couple of hours, and is therefore advantageous.



In the case—the frequent case—of a cookless home, you go to the city to dine, and perhaps to the theatre. This happens so often, that you appear to own your own home merely to sleep in it. But you always say to your friends: "It is sleeping in the country that I love; the air is so sweet, and so different to that of the

city." Just the same, you envy the fortunates who just drop into a taxi, or a street car, and are at home, whilst you are still waiting for your train at the station.

WAITING for trains is one of the sweets of the country. In time you get used to it, just as eels are said to grow accustomed to being skinned, but at first, it is rather irritating. It is too piquant. As you rush pell-mell down the stairs into the station, to discover that the gates are just closed, and that a full hour of peaceful inactivity is before you, you mutter rude things under your breath. At that particular moment, it is difficult to realize that you dearly love your sleep in the country, and that the air is so sweet.

The truth is that you are not worrying about

air at all. The infernal train has routed your equanimity. Although I know that people pretend to like a great many of the unpleasant events foisted upon them—it is a sort of religion with them to do that—nobody *could* affect to enjoy waiting hours for trains. Whilst languishing at the station, there are just three things to do—drink sodas, until you feel like a balloon; read newspapers and magazines avidly, and go to sleep, with the chance of missing another train. The last is the most popular, and I have met men who have dozed for hours, and missed half a dozen trains. It is very restful.

The commuter who times himself to catch a train, is the gentleman who misses it. The

proper thing to do is to go to the station perfectly unconscious of the time, and to take a chance. In the long run that pays best, and worries least. Whenever I see an unfortunate studying his time-table conscientiously, and lost to the world, I know that the poor chap is

doomed to miss his train. He has left himself just the correct time in which to reach the station, and the correct time never counts. He will wait an hour for the next train. I used to carry a book with me, and whenever I missed a train, it was my pleasure to sit and read. In

that way I missed so many trains, that it seemed to me I was always at the station. The train I was waiting for, came and went; so did the next, and on one occasion, I nearly missed the last train, so engrossed was I in my book.

THE commuter suffers greatly at the theatre whither he goes when he is cook-less—and sometimes when he isn't. If the drama only knew how little it meant to the commuter, it would fall from its high horses in disgust. No matter how exciting a play may be, he is out with his watch, wondering if he will miss the last train. For the benefit of commuters—and how many thousands of us there are!—I would suggest a new brew of playwrights, who place their "big scene" in the second act, instead of in the third or last.

The trouble with the modern drama is—and it *is* a trouble—that nothing dramatic happens until nearly eleven o'clock, and at that hour, the commuters are growing restless. They are scenting difficulties. They foresee a hasty departure for the station, the disarrangement of their neighbours, and the smallest chance of catching the last train.

As for the first nights of musical comedies, when incessant encores prolong a performance to unseemly length, they are torture to the commuter. The poor chap wants to get his money's worth, or as nearly that as possible, and the "show" positively refuses to end at a decent hour. Everything is delayed. He sees his train in the station; he realizes that he must go out at the most interesting moment—perhaps the *only* interesting moment—and his enjoyment is ruined. He really has a horrid time. I would suggest that there be certain nights set aside for commuters, at which the last act is played first, so that the first act can conveniently be missed.

Commuters play a very important part in the

make-up of every audience. It is a pity that their plight should not be taken into account. The commuter often goes home, without knowing the end of the play—unless he be quite sophisticated and able to guess. Of course, that doesn't bother *me*. The last act of a play is the least important, as far as I am concerned, and I realize that in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, the hero and the heroine will be married before midnight. I should like to see them happily, or, even unhappily married at about nine-thirty. In the case of those "surprise" detective plays, when in the very last act everybody turns out to be somebody else, just as the final curtain falls, you notice that the entire audience is on tenterhooks wondering how on earth things will straighten themselves out, but *you* are on tenterhooks because you know that if they don't straighten themselves

out quickly, and without hesitation, you will be stranded for pure want of a train. Your problem is: shall you wait and know how it ends, or shall you rush and catch your train?

Under the circumstances, you grow peevish, and resent the dilatory methods of the modern drama, which refuses to come to a head at a decent time. The playwright is anxious to send you home with a *punch,* but punching commuters is a thankless proceeding. The commuter, like everybody else, likes the punch, but he likes it early. Last trains take no account of the dramatic punch, and wot nothing of it. That is their mistake, but it affects the poor commuter tremendously. And the awful thing is that even dramatic critics commute! You really cannot rely upon them. They are in the same boat—or the same last train—that you are in!

OU are in the same quandary when invited to a card party in the city. They don't care how long they play, or how long they delay the game, but you are confronted with the eternal business of catching your train. It is frequently very embarrassing.

You have been winning heavily at bridge, and the others are none too agreeable. They speak frankly of your disgusting luck, and they murmur little sarcastic things—the sort of things that grow so luxuriantly on the bridge field. Your score is a big one, and at any other time, you would be immensely proud of it. You have made a couple of grand slams, and you really could do no wrong. Your opponents announce desperately that this time they are going to show you that they can do things, and that mere luck is

not everything. Oh, it is never your good play; it is your despicable luck.

At that very moment, you look nonchalantly at your watch. It occurs to you with hateful and insidious persistence that you have just time to catch your last train, *if* you rush.

"I'm awfully sorry," you say pleasantly, but timidly. "You know I'm a commuter, and though I should love to give you your revenge, I really must go. You will excuse me, I am sure. I have had such a lovely time." They know that. They are sure of that. They can see the score! Oh, yes, they are quite certain that you have had a lovely time. It is no mere figure of speech. They glare. Horrible remarks are on the tips of their tongues. You realize that they would insult you, if they were not so well-bred. Your host says a few words in which he endeavours to conceal his feelings. He mutters something about the pity of breaking up the game, and so forth. But there you are carrying off all the spoils, and leaving the game at the critical moment. One or two of the guests will perhaps smile cynically, and an

occasional epigram on the subject of commuters' bridge trips lightly from a caustic tongue.

You really loathe yourself, and are filled with remorse, which is quite futile. Your host sees you to the door, and you feel quite degraded as you remark conventionally: "I have had such an enjoyable game." Never have conventional remarks seemed so inane. Then you have a most emphatic idea that you will be reviewed in scathing terms as soon as that door is closed. Of course, you won because you played an awfully thoughtful and intellectual game, but nobody will agree with you, as you beat a retreat to the station.

On one occasion only did I win everything at bridge, but in the excitement of rushing for my train, I ran off with somebody else's hat—a very much better one than mine, and long before the owner discovered his loss (*my* hat was the one I wear gardening) I was on my way home, and beyond his jurisdiction. That was adding insult to injury.

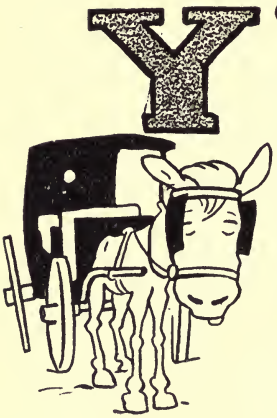
The entire business is very exhausting. Then

the men at the gate, know you so well, that they do not bother to look at your commutation ticket and it sometimes happens that, in the mad rush, you find yourself in the wrong train, bound for some unknown locality, at the dead of night. You see, you are in such a hurry. On one occasion, I just managed, as I thought, to catch my train, after having assisted at the last act of a drama, and the moment we pulled out, I realized, by certain indications, that I was on my way to the thriving town of Jamaica.

Now Jamaica is thriving, and is awfully pleasant for those who live there, but to be cast into its midst at midnight, miles and miles away from your own bedstead, is not at all humorous. That little error, due to rush, cost me a handsome sum, for I was obliged to hire a motor to take me to my own fireside. *Festina lente,* is one of the memories of my school days and it would be a very useful motto for me in my present condition of commuterdom, but the trouble is that whilst one *festinas,* he never has any *lente* about it.

As for the supper which the New Yorker

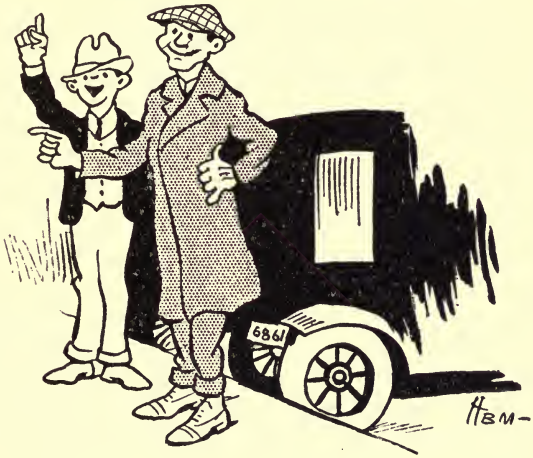
considers the feature *par excellence* of the day, and for which the theatre is frequently merely an excuse, it is rigidly excluded from the commuter's diary, or at least from the diaries of all those whom I have met. There may be some who know the joy of all night schedules, but they are not on my visiting list. Occasionally one has five minutes in which to snatch an indigestible sandwich, but even then, it is not precisely appetizing, as there is the baleful idea of the train preparing to set forth. The commuter's night life consists in walking through dark and fragrant thoroughfares from the station to the home. Even then, he is in a hurry to get out of the darkness.



YOU may ask what has happened to the famous village hack? And I answer: Nothing. I wish that something *would* happen to the village hack, but nothing ever will. The village hack is very much in the same class as the village mosquito. It is there, just because it is there. It serves no appreciable purpose. I do not even consider it picturesque, though I may be in the minority. The village hack is there when the weather is balmy, and the zephyrs pleasant. When it rains or snows, the village hack is a dense mystery. I imagine that the hackman goes into retreat, and there he stays until the weather settles itself. He fears the rain, and he has a mortal dread of the snow. He *does* love the fine weather, and the fact that he is in no demand at that time, does not daunt him. He has no desire to be in demand. He

likes to sun himself, to bask, and to savour the delight of dulcet inactivity.

The village hackman is of a playful nature. He adores his little jest, but to me his humour is slap-stick. Perhaps I am prejudiced. For



instance, I telephone him to be at my house in order to take me to a certain train. Then I calmly sit and wait for him. I continue sitting and waiting. He does not appear. I telephone irately that I have waited so long that I have missed my train, and I realize the full signifi-

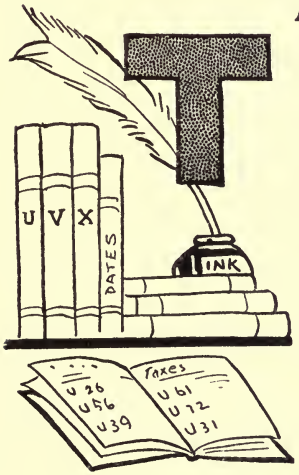
cance of his little jest. I call it mortuary humour. It is grim and relentless. Of course, the weather is too fine, and he prefers to sit and sun himself.

When you have an important appointment, absolutely dependant upon one particular train, and this sort of thing occurs, you grow vastly indignant and perhaps you curse. When you meet the village hackman, however, he smiles courteously, if sardonically, and explains that he was quite ready to call for you, when you telephoned, but that you evidently did not trust him.

His vehicle is usually of the calibre known as ramshackle, and frequently you feel that the bottom will drop out, and that you will find yourself running at the same gait as the horse. The sides are also none too sure of themselves, and with a little persuasion, would permit you to fall by the wayside.

You always tip the village hackman, and I never know why. However, as you tip the hat check boy at restaurants, and also do the honourable thing by your barber, and his satellites,

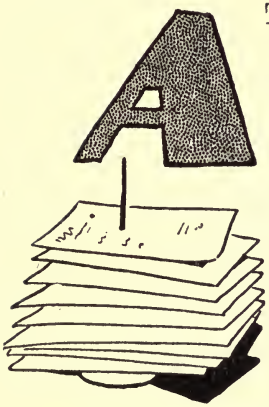
I suppose it is for the same reason that you press a *pourboire* on the village hackman. It is so pleasant to do nice things when they are expected of you.



TALKING of tips, reminds me of taxes. The very word "taxes" has a prosaic sound—an iron, unyielding, and rather unpleasant significance, don't you think? That used to be my opinion, at any rate. Today, I consider that taxes are as amusing as any farce, and I must admit that in all my years of theatre-going—three decades of 'em—I have seen nothing staged as funny, as satirical, as fantastic, as Gilbertian, as Barrie-asque, and as rollicking as the Tax Office—that appertaining to *my* taxes, and of course I can speak of no other.

After I had "owned my own home" for a couple of years or so—especially *so*—it suddenly dawned upon me, one bright and winsome day, when the birds were twittering in the sunshine, and the air was laden with the balmy perfume of a thousand flowers, more or less, that nobody had ever asked me to pay any taxes at all, and I had always heard that taxes were sore points in every ill-regulated suburban life. Not one cent had ever been asked of me, and I wondered why. It seemed too good to be true, and yet it *was* true. Perhaps for some entirely admirable reason, I was exempt. It might even be that I was not worth taxing. Then again, possibly the tax dignitary was a nice, thoughtful, affectionate person who discriminated. I conjured up all sorts of explanations.

When I heard the commuters on the trains almost weeping about their excessive taxes, I could scarcely repress a chuckle of triumph. The poor souls! Why was I—surely none too worthy—permitted to live untaxed whilst they, possibly braver and better men than I could ever hope to be, were forced to disgorge taxes?



AT first I thought of letting concealment prey upon my damask cheek, and all that sort of thing; also of realizing that discretion is sometimes the better part of valour. However, I was genuinely curious and my untaxed condition "intrigued" me, as the French would say. One day on the train, I was cheek-by-jowl with an ancient tax payer, who had done his duty unerringly for countless years, and I decided to unbosom myself. I had noticed that the A. T. P. was quite peevish on the subject of his inordinate taxes.

"Do you know," I queried affably, as we smoked our way home, "that I have never paid any taxes at all—not once since I have suburbanized?"

The A. T. P. went on smoking, and said nothing whatsoever.

"I have never paid any taxes at all," I repeated. "Not once."

"Wal," said the A. T. P. "I think you're kind er foolish. Perhaps you can use the money, but you'll find that seven per cent. mounts up. If I were you, I'd pay."

"They have never sent me in any bill," I declared. "Only fools pay before they get their bills." (I felt *so* astute.)

"The Tax Office doesn't send in bills," announced the A. T. P. growing amused. "If you wait until you get a bill, you'll wake up some fine morning, and discover that you don't own your own home at all."

I winced. The A. T. P. was evidently saying things that I did not comprehend in my artless metropolitan way. He was revealing some unexpected secret. Apparently there was something quaint somewhere, beyond my ken. And assuredly there was! I could scarcely credit my own ears. My informant, seeing that I was "green"—clad with all sorts of verdure—told me the fatal truth. The Tax Office did not bother about sending in bills. Why should it?

Unpaid taxes accumulated at the rate of

seven per cent. per annum, for a certain number of annums—or should it be *anni?*—and then, if still unpaid, the dear, delightful officials sold you out, and you became as homeless as any melodramatic heroine. And there was I, headed for the straight road of homelessness.

ONCE back in my homestead, I wrote a neatly worded letter to the Tax Office at Long Island City, and asked pleasantly for my bill, pledging myself, in black and white, to send a check by return. Can a well-regulated person do more?

No reply. Again I was agreeably optimistic. There was no doubt about it at all; I was exempt, and for some exquisite reason that was of no consequence. In the commuters' train that night I spotted the Ancient Tax Payer, and confided in him. I explained that I had done everything in my

power to secure my tax bill, but it was not forthcoming. There was no sign of it. For a moment or two, he seemed puzzled, and then his face radiated knowledge.

"Did you enclose a two cent stamp?" he queried.

"Enclose a two cent stamp for the favour of receiving a bill?" I asked, in amused indignation.

"Precisely," was the reply. "The Tax Office" doesn't clamour to send in bills. It profits by unpaid taxes. Therefore it will not pay postage. Send them a cute little crimson postage stamp, and they will reply."

Imagine enclosing a stamp to your tailor, and pleading for a bill; or to your grocer, or—let me make it OR—to your plumber!

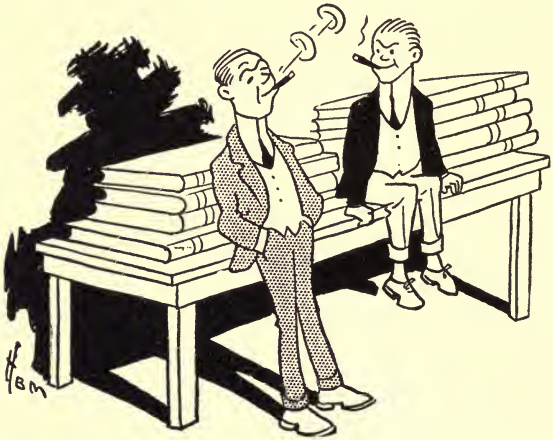
In due course, my tax bill arrived, and I realized to the full extent, how thoroughly UN-exempt I was! Never was human being more un-exempt. Interest at the rate of seven per cent. was charged for what I should have loved to pay, if only I had been consulted. Then there were several items that I felt certain were

unnecessary—so much so that I decided to take a trip to the Office, *in propria persona.* A kind-hearted friend volunteered to go with me.

"You'll need a guide," he said. "You must have one. Would you try to climb the Alps without a guide? Would you go to a gipsy camp outside of Granada all by yourself?"

THE easiest part of going to the Tax Office, is—going! When you arrive there, a dire sense of helplessness assails you. You feel like the proverbial chicken that has dug up a penknife. It is a large and rather ornate place, completely filled with clerks. When we entered, the clerks appeared to have just lunched. Like my plumbers, they were relentless lunchers. They were toying daintily with toothpicks,

smoking and chatting affably. They were evidently agreeable youths, but they paid no attention to us at all. We were as though we were not. They never even glanced at us or said "Hail to you." They were immaculately shirted, and almost dolorously neat.



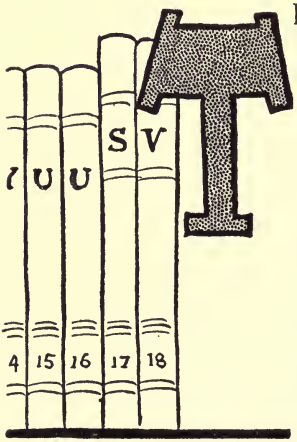
At first we stood and looked at them, and waited for somebody to break the ice. Nothing happened. They were all doing nothing, doing it thoroughly, and manifestly enjoying it. They seemed affluent, and even opulent. Then my guide diffidently suggested that I—

pointing to me—would like to pay my taxes. One individual, who wore a pink shirt, and a cute little bow-knot, cast a most suspicious glance at me—the sort of look you might have expected if it had been announced that I had just murdered my entire family, including the servants.

Really, I shivered. I felt every inch the culprit. The individual grunted and referred us to somebody else. It happened that the somebody else had not yet returned from luncheon. Was this the Tax Office or the Plumbers' Union? I asked myself. In luncheon lies salvation, it would seem. The only thing to do was wait, and we did it. When the somebody else got back, with his toothpick at hard work, we rushed at him frantically, and recited our "piece" for his benefit. He looked airily over our heads and referred us to a third party, at a considerable distance from himself. It seemed to me that actually they must hate the idea of my paying taxes, and that I was antagonizing them. However, I was now obsessed with a wild and exultant desire to discharge

my indebtedness. They should not balk me. Pay my taxes I *would*, even if I had to stab somebody, and pour the gold over his prostrate body.

In about two hours, and it seemed like a week, we were asked to consult certain volumes, and to make sure that we got our requisite number in those volumes. They know me only as "U51"—which is not a submarine, but the location of my "property."



THE books we had to consult made Bartlett's Concordance to Shakespeare look like a pocket dictionary. They were tremendous, and awful, and quite mystic. A strange thing had occurred, or at least it seemed strange to us. Although I was U51, they had plied me with a bill belonging to V51, and evidently expected me to pay it un-

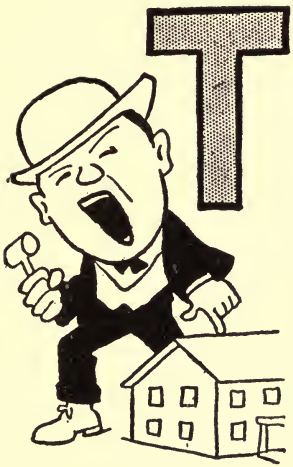
questioningly. Now I daresay that V51 was a perfectly respectable and pious person, but why should I pay his bills? My admiration for respectability and piety need not go as far as that. My guide told me that if I had not visited the Office, and had paid the bill, as sent in, I should

merely have settled V51's account, and mine would have gone on accumulating interest at the rate of seven per cent. Such a sweet idea!

We pored over the volumes until our brains were dizzy. Nobody helped us, or noticed us. The nice young clerks told stories, some of

which were evidently spicy, judging by the peculiar brand of laughter that greeted them, and were exceedingly loquacious, but not to us. They glanced at us occasionally, as though quite entertained by our distraught demeanour, and I think they liked my clothes. I heard one of them commenting on the cut of my coat, and I was pleased to be approved by such authorities. They were still busy doing nothing at all, except waiting to go home after their hard day's work. I think that some of them must have been "lounge lizards."

At last my guide announced that he had everything straight, and had rectified the error by which I was to pay V51's bill instead of mine own—that of U51. He insisted upon referring to me as U51, and I wondered if I should sign my tax check as merely "U51."



THEY were not bowed down with grief when we told them of the mistake in the bill. The lad in the pink shirt who had wandered in our direction, smiled as though at a merry complication. It was just typographical, or something of that sort, they averred. It was so easy to mistake a U for a V. Perchance. I vented no satire upon them, as I felt certain that it would be lost. One of the lounge lizards did say—and I must not forget it—that it was a pleasant day. I failed to agree with him, but permitted him to have it his own way.

My taxes were quite appalling, but there was no dodging them. I could have let them go on accumulating, until it was time to be sold out, and to be cast out—out—into the night. I had

a weird impulse to do it, as I considered it all very disturbing to one's equanimity.

"I'll write you a check for the full amount at once," I said loftily, "and I shall be obliged for your receipt."

"Is the check certified?" asked the lounge lizard.

"No," I replied, "but I am good for that amount."

"As soon as the check has gone through, we will send you a receipt," he said in a routine way—and his voice reminded me of that of the guide who conducted me through Warwick Castle. "That will be in about ten days."

I thanked him graciously for his courtesy, and proceeded to depart.

"Hey!" he exclaimed in his boyish way. "You must leave me a two cent stamp, or we cannot mail you a receipt."

HE Tax Office certainly does love two cent stamps. It must eat them. Perhaps the lounge lizards lunch upon them. It is a wonder to me that they speak without a two cent stamp being dropped into their mouths. They must get tons of them. There must be a dungeon full of them. The two cent stamp is a religion with the Tax Office. It is a sort of sacred rite. Perhaps the lounge lizards are literary, and buy the stamps to send with their manuscripts for a "prompt return if unavailable." Who knows? I have omitted to say that my guide always referred to some high dignitary—the controller, or somebody—with whom he appeared to be acquainted. Every time he mentioned that name, the Tax Office people seemed to be on the alert. Without it, I feel convinced that I should not have

paid my taxes to this day. This mysterious name appeared to mean a great deal. I forget what it was. It sounded like Prendergast, but I may be mistaken. It was a wondrous name.

When you pay your taxes, and *if* you pay your taxes, you do it twice each year, in May and November. As you are never notified, and it is quite possible that you may have other precious thoughts that claim your mind, you can do this, and I did it: You pay a small sum per annum, to a certain firm that undertakes to send you your bills as they come due. In other words, you pay for the privilege of receiving your bills. The Tax Office disclaims all responsibility, so it has grown to be a business —a lovely industry, I think.

There is a gentle fantasy about it that is disarming. Some people would pay *not* to receive their bills. Tax payers just reverse that. How many men would dole out cash for the sheer pleasure of knowing how much they owe their tailor? Would you subscribe to an agency that promised to send you your tailor's bills when they were due?

OCCASIONALLY when you fondly believe, and devoutly trust that you have paid everything—nay more—you see on your hardly-acquired tax bill the weird word "Arrears." That means that there is still some trifle left unpaid, and that if you do not look it up, it will become a "lien upon the property." The Tax Office is always ready to lean upon your property. I am bound to say that the lounge lizards in Long Island City look as though they could lean upon anything, and be comfortable. The "arrears" may be a mistake. They may have called you by the pet name of "V51" instead of your proper title of "U51."

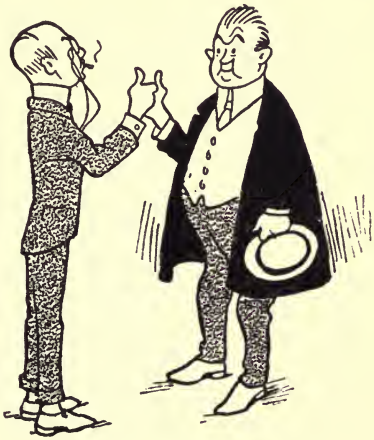
Anyway, I would sooner pay double taxes than take that plaintive trip to the Tax Office, and inspect the boys in the immaculate shirts.

Also I waste my time, and theirs—not that mine cuts much ice, but theirs does. They have no idle moments to spend upon such trifles as taxes. Why on earth should nice, affable Tax Office people worry themselves about taxes? You feel extremely guilty as you intrude your petty affairs upon them. You experience a curious sense of offensive officiousness. It is most disconcerting. So, now that I know, I just send a pleasant check to my firm of tax searchers, and hope for the best. Whatever they charge, they are worth more. I consider them as perfectly invaluable. I am very, very fond of them. I should like to ask them to dinner some day, and chat with them, over the coffee and *liqueur*.

I used to imagine that tax payers were awfully important people, and that Tax Office officials petted them, and made quite a lot of them; gave them choice cigars, and inquired after the health of their families. Of course

they are not important at all. They are merely numbered nonentities—designed to afford office employment to the nice little lounge lizards—or if not office employment, at least office room.

What chap can feel important when he is just U51—without even a Thomas, or a Charles, or a James, to temper the formality of it all? When I am tempted to feel at all pleased with myself—and I admit that it is not often—I just think of myself as U51, and am properly abashed and ready to grovel.



I have experienced a keen desire to meet V51 some day, and to tell him that I nearly paid his taxes for him. Still, it is extremely difficult to recognize a person with no other clue to his identity than V51. I picture V51 to myself as a stout, rather ma-

terial person, with no sense of humour. I don't know why I visualize him in that way, but I do. We may meet some day. He may say agreeably, "I am V51," and then I shall reply haughtily and condescendingly, "And I am U51, at your service, for anything but your taxes." Perhaps it will be difficult to suggest proper dignity with such a title as U51, but I think I shall be able to do it.

I DO not dislike the water rate people. *They* send in their bills. Oh, that I should ever have grown to appreciate people just because they send in their bills! I never cry for a water rate bill; it is always there. I fancy that we must drink a great deal too much water, as my rates are so high. Still, I always insist upon a large pitcher of ice water in the hall during the evening, as I have been

brought up to that idea. Also, I invariably take a big tumbler of water to my bedroom at night, in the belief that I might be thirsty. Of course, I *could* economize. I fancy I could get along with a smaller pitcher of ice water, and also give up the silly idea of drinking in the middle of the night.

I suppose that my big tumbler of water night after night, must mount up. My nocturnal drinks must be many gallons per year, and really the high cost of drinking cannot be overlooked. I have never heard of anybody economizing on water, but I am not at all sure that it would not be advisable. It does happen sometimes that I do not awaken during the night, and that the big tumbler of water of course, goes to waste. I always sigh as I look at that wasted water. I begged my cook to use it for the tea in the morning, but she insisted that water, after standing all night in a bedroom, was not good to drink. Servants are so extravagant.

I wrote to the Water Rate department, and complained about my bill, and suggested that

my only extravagances were ice water during the evening, and a large tumbler full at night. I received no reply. Perhaps I forgot to enclose a two cent stamp.

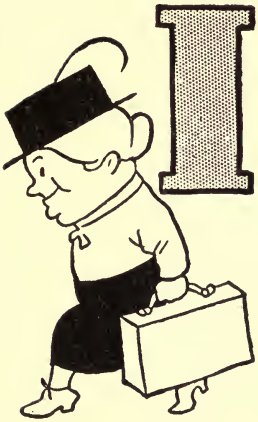
When some other fellow owns your home, you never think of water. You just revel in it, and bathe in it, and drink it, and even throw it away. Once upon a time, the mere idea of paying for water would have convulsed me with mirth. Not so today. I really hate to throw any away. For my bath, I am very careful not to be too reckless. Unfortunately, I have that fountain, and though it is rarely used, it is a suspicious feature to the Water Rate people. They insisted upon putting in a meter, just for the fountain. They are most punctilious about it, and now the "splashing and gurgling of the waters" instead of soothing, irritates me. With that fountain, I am a marked man with the Water Rate department, and I daresay I am known in the records as "U51 and Fountain."

HOWEVER fantastic and Gilbertian the tax question may be, it is prosaic and dull compared with the ever-recurring and jocundly morbid servant question. For incessant excitement, tempered with an inrush and outrush of all the moods, there is nothing like the lovely topic broached so archly in the public prints as "help wanted."

Many positively refuse to consider this problem funny. They can see no humour in it. They suffer, and suffering is tragedy. They decline to analyse the elements that make up their martyrdom, and cannot "get" the perspective. I think it is a great pity. I am completely devoted to the subject of servants. Even on the stage, humorous cooks, and jocular maids invariably appeal to my sense of humour.

For instance, I would spend my last dollar to see May Vokes in her "slavey" impersonations. I know them; I am quite certain what she will do; I have seen her a dozen times, and yet the mere announcement of her re-appearance always fills me with joy. I look upon her work as pure humour. Then there was May Robson, who actually made her reputation by this style of work—and did it years ago, when we were far less perplexed than we are today. As for Maude Eburne, a more recent "slavey" imitator, she lifted a three act play to success.

Many actresses have become famous as "cooks." Today it is my belief that many cooks become famous as actresses. They must be on the stage, for they do not seem to be anywhere else.



"I LIKE you," said my cook to me almost tenderly one morning, when she had announced her farewell, "and I like your family. I have no fault to find with any of you. You have all treated me well. But the country *is* so dull. I feel I am wasting my life. I miss the picture houses in New York and in the evenings I am fond of dancing."

She had one tooth in her head, poor soul, and that was none too reliable. There was a wistful look on her ancient Irish face, and I felt awfully sorry for her. You see, I cannot dance. My education has been grossly neglected, otherwise, in order to brighten up the poor creature's leisure moments, I would have tangoed with her. It did seem a pity to let her go just because she yearned for the dance, and I was unable to oblige. Every commuter should make

up his mind to acquire the Terpsichorean art. He may not care for it himself, but into the life

of every suburbanite, comes a cook who must dance, or stagnate. To keep cook in the country, happy and joyous, and contented, the commuter should be able to entertain her, as she expects and deserves to be entertained. Mine left me; as I said, I cannot dance. It is not because I am too old—Methuselah would be tremendously popular in the ballrooms of today; it is not because I am too awkward. There is really no sound reason for it. But I cannot dance.

OST small towns or villages own a picture-house—it is the very latest agony in polite suburban tortures—but it is wise to mention the fact when seeking help. I always say proudly when cook looms on the horizon: "We have such a nice, cosy little picture-house." I cannot say that she is thrilled, but pictures are better than nothing—just better than nothing—to cook.

At first I used to advertise ingenuously that I had a "good home" to offer, and I always fancied that this would make a hit. As a matter of fact, it is fatal. The one thing that servants in the country fear, in mortal anguish, is a good home. It is the horror of their lives—a great drab, bromidic horror. A quick service of trains, warranted to take them away from

their good home as rapidly as possible, is the great *pièce de résistance,* if I may use such an expression. In fact, so completely does suburban help despise the good home, that I have often thought it would be worth advertising: "Bad home guaranteed."

It occurred to me, and I thought it a wonderfully clever idea, that a couple, married if possible—but I am no prude to ask embarrassing questions—would solve the problem. By "married," of course, I mean married to each other. For a year, I tried all available brands of married couples but I am bound to say that they were not encouraging. They behaved like the hero and heroine in sex plays. The "he" usually wore vine leaves in his hair, as Ibsen would put it neatly, and the "she" as a result thereof, generally appeared on the scenes with at least one black eye.

I had to pretend never to notice the black eye, and this was rather difficult. It was almost impossible to overlook it. Each couple refused to go to the picture-house, and seemed to prefer staying at home, and hating each other. The

"he" invariably complained about the "she" and *vice versa.*

Having been nourished on the drama, naturally my thoughts flew to the eternal triangle, and I felt that if I could only arrange one, all would be well. However, the idea, though perfectly tepid in modern drama, seemed a bit immoral for suburban use, and I could not bring myself to try it for home consumption. Moreover, all my cooks seemed hopeless for eternal triangle purposes, and I have often wondered how they managed to find the one angle that I had engaged.

SERVANTS in the country really hate twittering birds, pure ozone, blooming flowers, balmy zephyrs, and other suburban perquisites. These seem to get on their nerves. One feels like apologizing for them. I have frequently thought it necessary to say: "If you will only stay till winter, you will not be bothered with the birds, and all the flowers will be dead. Perhaps you can put up with the pure ozone which, I grieve to say, is there in winter."

In winter, they worry about the snow—unlike to commuter. He loves it and just waits for it. Servants prefer the brand that is popular in the city—the nice, black, sticky kind, with little germs in it. Cook sees no beauty in the vast, undefiled expanse of marvellous whiteness that she can see from her bedroom

window. In fact, no sooner *does* she see it, than she gives notice. It depresses her. She is temperamental.

One couple I engaged thought my house dull because I did not give many dinner parties. They liked the excitement of watching guests, and said so. I explained that there were really no people to invite, unless I brought them out from New York. I felt awfully sorry about it, and rather guilty. This couple was used to "life" and gaiety, and could not bear the gloom of the country.

Each night, I felt miserable thinking of those poor souls mewed up in their frightfully comfortable room, simply wasting their young lives in my service. She might have been whirling in the dance, and he could have graced any barroom in any city. I had blighted two lives, and it made me feel wretched and responsible. It was so impossible to furnish them with proper, or even improper entertainment. Many actors and actresses live near me, and often I have wondered if I could not induce them to come round and give some sort of parlour

entertainment for my servants. Henry E. Dixey lives near me, and he might have recited

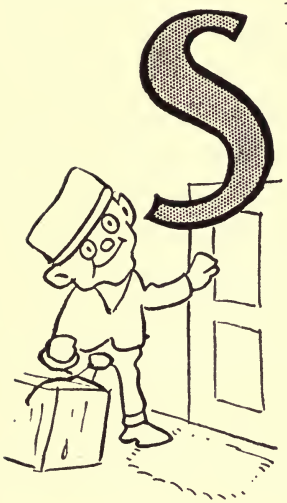
for cook; Miss Nance O'Neill dwells not far away, and she could have offered a monologue in that organ-like voice of hers (I know cook would love it!); Miss Vera Michelena is conveniently adjacent, and could have sported some of her gorgeous gowns; Miss Rose Stahl, Mr. Miller Kent, James J. Corbett, and a dozen others could surely have helped to make cook's life less monotonous. However, all these people love their homes, and want to forget the stage. So do I, but I would be a martyr if I could make cook less restless.

ONE couple that honoured me, were residents of the village, and they seemed like a genuine solution of the problem. They were prominent in society, and coloured. But alas! they were tinted butterflies. They used to rush us through meals in a way that made the digestive faculties wince. They banged down the dishes and stood over us like stern Nemises, until we had finished. We were never allowed to take twice of anything. Once, I remember, I begged for a little more pudding, as it was especially nice. But when I looked round, my plate had gone, and so had the pudding. I acquired the habit of bolting my food, and we all lost the art of mastication. The dreadful feeling that we were keeping the couple from society functions became most oppressive.

They gauged our appetites. No sooner did

they consider that we had taken the requisite amount of nourishment, than they quickly removed everything and were out of the house instantly, not to return till the "wee sma' hours." They really begrudged us our bit of food. They just fed us—threw bits at us. They reminded me of the vaudeville team that juggles dishes, food, and lighted lamps. That is amusing at the theatre, but at home, it is a trifle enervating.

They left, because I began to suffer from acute indigestion, and my physician said that I must take time at my meals. My family lost flesh. We were never able to speak during meals. We had just time to swallow. When I had guests, we had always finished before they had started in, and that is so embarrassing. My guests were amazed, and I was forced to explain, and to suggest that they emulate our example. Still, rather than break up a happy home, I would have continued in this course, if my doctor had not protested. One must consider one's health.



SERVANTS in the country never seem to get very friendly with tradespeople. In the city, cook does manage to enjoy a flirtation with the grocer, or the iceman—particularly the iceman—and it freshens up her life. It furnishes the essential "pep." But in the suburbs, the sex drama is dead. The tradespeople are merely business-like, and never pause for a "love" interlude. They are entirely devoid of what dramatic critics call "heart interest." They arrive at the back door, and leave their commodities without a word, fond or otherwise. It may be that my cooks have always been lacking in "magnetism" and "sex appeal"—I have sometimes imagined that it must be that—but I am inclined to believe that country tradespeople are obdurate.

Life in the country during the frequent intervals between cooks, is not exhilarating. In the city, it is endurable. One can rush out to dine or lunch. In the country, one can only rush out! There is nowhere to dine or lunch, except the drug store, where a constant diet of evil sodas would be disastrous. One is completely at the mercy of the merciless ones, and they know it. They can, and they do impose conditions, to which one is bound to subscribe, or starve.

"I prefer the seashore, if I must leave the city," asserted one lady who was coquetting with my offer of employment. "I like to g'win bathing." Unfortunately I had not a yard of seashore to offer. I promised to pay for an occasional outing to the breakers—any breakers—but it was no good. She wanted a supply of them outside her kitchen, and refused anything else. She said she loved the ocean in summer, and the city in winter. They can choose. You and I have to be satisfied with an all-the-year residence anywhere. They can have their pleasant changes for the asking.

I HAVE arrived at the conclusion that I cordially dislike the Vanderbilts, and detest the Astors. That sounds like an irrelevantly spiteful outbreak, unwarranted by apparent facts. However, I beg to say that the statement is absolutely warranted. It seems to me that ever since I became a commuter, I have been sheltering the Vanderbilt and Astor cooks. The number of servants I have had who had "once worked for the Vanderbilts"—likewise Astors—is extraordinary.

They were all so dreadful, and so hopeless, and so disagreeable, and so incompetent that gradually the mere names of Vanderbilt and Astor became odious to me. My good opinion of the Vanderbilts and Astors gradually gave way to the cordial dislike I have just men-

tioned, as I realized what unpleasant homes they must enjoy, if their cooks were any criterion. The only food that the Vanderbilt and Astor cooks who haunted my *ménage* seemed able to "serve" was the brand known as "delicatessen." Beyond that, they never soared.

No, I never actually applied either to the Vanderbilts or the Astors for references. I took the word of the cooks—the spoken word. At first, I used to gloat over the idea that I had a real Vanderbilt cook, who could cater nobly to my guests. Then when the status of these cooks became apparent, I grew to dread the very name of Vanderbilt and Astor. As soon as the new applicant murmured "Vanderbilt"—and always in an awed tone—I shuddered. Now I almost feel impelled to insert in my advertisements: "No Vanderbilt or Astor cooks need apply."

One hesitates at calling up these folks to ask pert questions about their alleged cook. Once I actually did that. I called up the Vanderbilt house, to demand a reference for Matilda Eisenstein, who insisted that she had "once worked

for the Vanderbilts." A butleresque voice answered the telephone, and when I made known my mission, told me to hold the wire. I did that, and learned later that the pretty title "Matilda Eisenstein" was in the memory of no member of the Vanderbilt home.

Of course they might forget Matilda, though Matilda would never forget them. Still, it was unsatisfactory. Matilda scarcely knew when water was popularly supposed to boil, and her idea of a nice dinner consisted of a few slices of cold ham, and a box of sardines.

How our millionaires live! Alas, for the Vanderbilts! Misericordia, for the Astors!

ONE couple arrived, took possession, and aroused our frantic hopes. An hour later, Lubin appeared and spake thus: "We have looked around, and we find that we do not like it at all. So we are off. Good-bye. Hope you'll be suited soon. This is a dull hole."

Of course it *is* dull. That I admit. Nothing exciting ever happens. One strange person in the street, is regarded with suspicion, whilst two strangers are absolutely baffling. Even the gossip is lacking in adventure, and in spice, and scandal is at a premium. I am never surprised at the drabness of cook's outlook, but alas! I can do nothing in the matter.

One cannot reasonably expect apartment hotels in the suburbs, but they are the only solution of the problem. Possibly we may adopt

the idea of the community home, which I should dislike cordially. A community in the city is bad enough; in the country it would be disastrous.

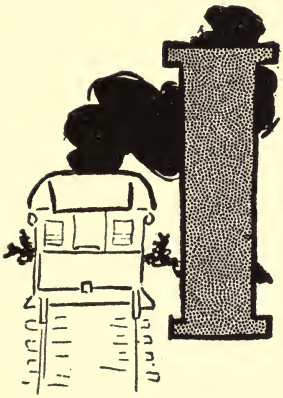
I have often wondered what has happened to the nice old villagers, anxious to earn some sort of a penny—the dear old folks that you read about in novels, as doffing their caps, and curtseying as they pass you? Please believe, on my authority, that they do not exist. They are mere figments of an exalted imagination. The natives of the villages have a rooted dislike for domestic work, or for any work at all. New arrivals are regarded merely as perfectly legitimate prey, to be imposed upon, and ruthlessly divested of the wherewithal. The natives are not the delicately unsophisticated toory-rooryals of sweet romance. Not a bit of it. They are as gods, knowing good and evil, and knowing *you,* too. The country air has sharpened their faculties; yours, you realize, are extremely blunt.

Weird folks come to your door, to sell the most unnecessary things—long-felt wants, that

nobody could possibly want. You wonder why they would not come and live in your pretty country home, and be useful, and smell the honeysuckle, and watch the blooming roses—and all that sort of thing—instead of indulging in their precarious occupation. But they will not listen to you. They may pity you—I am sure they do—but they refuse to help you.

What each modern country village needs, is a cabaret for cooks—some gay and rollicking resort, to which the maids may repair for recreation. My opinion is that this would be an excellent business proposition. The picture houses pall. Perhaps it is because they cannot afford the first "releases" and cook will not tolerate the old ones. Your retainers clamour for resorts like the Rialto, or the Strand, where there is some life, and some novelty.

Oh, it is very hard.



IN the city, the weeks pass unnoticed. In the country, no week goes by without an "end." You discover that the "week end" is a very important period, signifying that friends will come and stay with you until it is over. In town, you never worry about the end of a week, just because it *is* the end; in the country, you do. All your relatives will come and see you, because they adore the country, or that part of it in which you live. Oddly enough, they never seem to appreciate it on Monday or Tuesday. It appeals to them on Saturday, and Sunday. Then they are free to revel in it, to bask in it, and they are not compelled to rush home, unsatisfied. They can settle, as it were, and enjoy themselves comfortably, and nonchalantly.

They do not care for the country when they

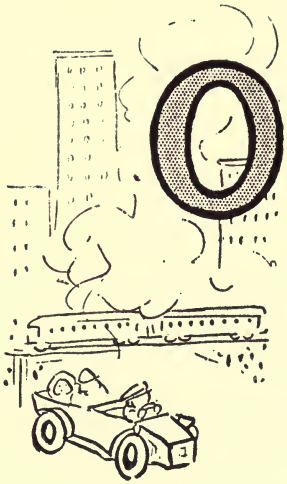
have to catch the homeward trains, the same night. That disturbs them. They prefer it when they can stay for a couple of nights, or so—and very often "so"—and reap the benefit of your pure ozone.

In winter, they are not nearly as affectionate as they are in summer. The warm weather reveals the fact that they are inordinately and surprisingly fond of you, and all that is yours. The snow and the extreme cold frequently keep them at home. But with the first bloom of the tulip, and the crocus—or any spring flowers you may happen to possess—they discover that after all, the suburbs are very charming, and healthful, "over the week end," of course. They like to make it worth their while, don't you know. They decide to come and stay, when they can do it with an easy conscience.

In the country, hospitality is naturally supposed to sprout. When you are living in town, nobody ever suggests that weeks have ends. Yet of course they have. Everything has. Nobody writes to you in the city where you have an apartment, to say that, if quite convenient,

a week end at your home would be very agreeable. But out of town, they love to be with you; to cheer you; to make your exile pleasant.

If they realize that you are a bit cramped for room (even big hotels are sometimes cramped for room in summer, and it is necessary to make reservations far ahead) they do not mind where they sleep. Anywhere will suit them. Just put a couch in the living-room, or on the porch, and they will be delighted. They rejoice at the idea of "roughing it," and I always think that very sweet of them. I am bound to say that week end visitors never find the country dull. They just sip the cream of it, so to speak. They sample it at its best, and you "entertain" them all day long. Sometimes they say artlessly: "I love a day like this. It is so restful and charming, but I don't think I should care to live here for good. It is nice for a change."



ONE confidential and enthusiastic guest said to me quite frankly: "The reason I am so fond of a day in the country, is that the city always seems so delightful when I get back."

They get thoroughly rested, and go back with a new zest for the city, and rather pitying you because you have to remain. You go to the station to see them off, and they tell you how charmed they were with their week end, because it was "just enough." Really, you feel quite dull, and envious as the train pulls out, and you return to a "week beginning."

Sometimes, however, they are so enthusiastic about it, that you are afraid they will miss their train, and continue in your midst—and of course, you have made other arrangements, or

would be charmed to have them. They know nothing about the time-table, and as the trains are few and far between, you feel bound to enlighten them. Many a time and oft, I have cudgelled my brains for some *nice* way in which to tell them that their train was due.

It is quite embarrassing. It looks so rude to say: "You really *must* go now, or you will miss your train." Or, "If you miss this train, you will not get another today." Still, it has to be done, and it requires very careful thought. The idea of the thing seems inhospitable—just like turning people out—but if they *won't* go, what can you do?

Sometimes, they go to the station alone, and

you sit at home, on pins and needles, fearing they have missed their train, and will be forced to return, and your servants have gone, and the bedrooms are unavailable! You listen for the whistle of the departing train, and heave a sigh of relief when you hear it. It sounds horrid, doesn't it? Such remarks might even indicate that you do not like guests. You do like them, but you do not want them to outdo their welcome, and it is just as much for their sake, as for your own that you hustle them to the train.

WEEK end weather, in the country, has an unhappy faculty of cutting up strange capers. I had some guests one gusty March week end, and behold! a blizzard blew up, without so much as asking you permission, or even giving you a friendly warning. It was a most blizzardly blizzard, and everybody sug-

gested affably that it might last for a week. The roads became impassable; the trains hailed the opportunity to take a long-needed rest, and even a trip to the village for provisions was out of the question.

Would you believe it? My guests at first were awfully sorry for *themselves.* He said to her: "Well, you *would* come, although I knew it was threatening," and she said to him: "It's just as bad for me to be stuck here, as it is for you." They nearly came to blows. They

didn't seem to mind *me* in the least. In fact, I was apparently a guilty party. It never occurred to them to think that mine was the hardest lot of all.

They were so grieved with the blizzard and the outlook, that for a long time, they positively refused to be comforted. We made them stiff cocktails, and it was only in that way, that their acute anguish was dulled. They stayed for three days, and after a time, seemed to get used to it, and to grow cheerful. They declared that, after all, it was "an experience" and really quite funny, when the sense of humour was in working order. Toward the end, they laughed heartily, and told me in confidence that they did not mind staying in the least, and that it was only at first that the idea appalled them.

My servants threatened to give notice, and complained about the "extra work"; provisions ran low, and could not be replenished; the deep snow kept us all indoors, and it seemed such a crowd! We all sat together and talked; we quarrelled over bridge, and became almost

abusive; we sat and waited for meals, as though they were the solitary relief, and we all said perfectly unnecessary things about the weather. They—my guests—declared that the country was frightful at such times; that it must be a dreadful thing to be stalled in this way at every storm, and that after all, the city was the only place for white people to live in. However, when they went home, they asserted that they had thoroughly enjoyed the humour of the experience, but that next time, they would consult the weather prophet before wandering into the wilds.

I really hate to hear my home spoken of as being situated in "the wilds." But it is a favourite expression with city visitors. They love to think that they are in the wilderness, and even allude to the idea of "camping out." I never appreciate that at all. I am also annoyed when they speak of a "dose of the country." They frequently do. It makes one feel so relentless. Week-end visitors are so inconsiderate.

The first day, the week end visitor says:

"How deliciously quiet it is. One doesn't hear a sound."

The next day he says with an entirely different intonation: "*How* quiet it is! Don't you ever hear a sound?"

These week end visitors like your home in the country—it being yours—but they usually admit that they would be afraid of it for themselves.

"Sometimes, I think," says one, "that the pleasures of the country must be very real, if one could only bring oneself to it. There is so much to be considered; it is like exile, isn't it?"

"I should like to live in the country just to entertain my friends," says another (and a liar!). "In the country one can give pleasure to so many."

And I know very many suburbanites who would like to return to the city, so that they *cannot* entertain their friends! Of course, it is very nice to open one's home to those whom we love, but why did this affection crop up so suddenly, and why can it flourish only in pure ozone?

As soon as they arrive, they invariably remark: "Now, I hope you won't make company of *us*. We hate being entertained."

I suppose they mean it. A few extra people in these days of servantless homes, make no difference at all. Half a dozen more to breakfast, dinner and supper, are a mere bagatelle. The country air does wonders—the sweet, fragrant country air. Half a person in a city home would be regarded as an incongruous extra.

It is astonishing how your city friends flock to your country home, and take root there—they just adore sitting on the piazza, and listening to the birdies—and look upon it as the most natural thing in the world. I am bound to say that they would enjoy it just as much if you were not there. It is the house that they love; the air; their freedom from dust and grime; not you! They beg you not to worry about them, and to consider that they are not there!

Long Sunday afternoons in the country, with plenty of guests, and nothing to do, are often rather wearing on the constitution. After dinner, I usually suggest a doze—a nice comfort-

able nap in the ozone. I love to tuck them up on cosy couches, and then to leave them for an hour or so. Sometimes they rebel a little, and urge that they have not taken the trip just to sleep, but I am adamant. I tell them that it is awfully good for them, and that they derive more benefit from an hour's sleep in the country than from six times that amount in the city. Often I have to plead very hard, but I must say that I *do* insist. To bed they go, *willy-nilly*. Also I manage to keep the house very quiet.

Now you may say that I appear to be an extremely unappreciative host, to which I reply, that I am a very wise one. I know that nature's sweet restorer will do wonders for my guests, and that sitting on a porch in a ring, like a minstrel show, and gossiping, is exceedingly bad for them. Then, it grows monotonous, and the largest stock of epigrams will give out after one hour's hard use.

Sometimes, when sleep is rejected, and they refuse to take a nap, I get even! I insist that they shall look at my garden, and I know that in half an hour, they will pine for their beds. I

tell them grewsome stories of parasites and vegetable insects. I expatiate on the advantages of fertilizer, which is quite a nauseating subject to the city person. They wander about, looking perfectly wretched, as I point out the garden peas, the beans, the radishes, and the parsley. Then, I show them the effect of "slug shot" and "bone fertilizer" and I teach them how to spray roses with nicotine, and other perfumes. They are obliged to profess intense interest but I am relentless. They wouldn't go to bed, so I treat them as though they were naughty children.

Their nice shoes are all spotted and soiled, and they soon grow quite melancholy. Besides it is very tiring looking at a garden. In very obdurate cases, I have asked my masculine guests to help me mow the lawn. At first they are usually delighted. Living in apartments in Manhattan, gets one out of the habit of mowing. When I lived in Harlem, I never mowed a thing!

I like to see perfectly spotless gentlemen, wearing silken shirts and hose, at work on the lawn. They are very pleased with themselves

as they start, but in ten minutes, or less, I notice the telltale beads of perspiration on their brow, and the breathing has grown stertorous. I feel quite innocent of evil-doing, having begged them to sleep, and having listened to

their refusal. Sometimes I ask them to do a little weeding for me.

Have you ever weeded? If not, try it. It is a pastime that has a beginning but *no* end. Why, the weeds grow while you are plucking out their best friends. You start at one end of a bed, pluck it weedless, and then go to the other end. When you have finished that, the first end

is full of weeds again. It is great sport, and your guests are at first very enthusiastic. I tell that it is a most invigourating exercise, and awfully good for rheumatism, and kindred ills. It is wonderful for acid in the system, and everybody seems to have acid.

The impromptu labourers stoop with extreme difficulty, but they are anxious to conceal that fact. Nobody likes to admit that it is in the least unpleasant to stoop. To pluck out weeds, it is necessary to get down on your knees, and positively grovel in the dust. The more abject the grovel, the more satisfactory the result.

I never let them do it in a perfunctory manner. "Be sure and get out the root," I always say, "or the weeds will sprout again."

It is rather unkind of me—I know that—but I am never cruel when I have acquiescent guests who will take a nap for an hour or so in the afternoon. I do it only in the case of those who apparently need entertainment. In that way, I am killing two birds with one stone—the guest-bird proving far more mortal than the weed-bird.

Of course, some of them *won't* weed, and won't mow. In that event, I do both, and permit them to stand around and look at me. It is most fatiguing watching any one weeding and mowing. I perspire much more freely when I watch a mower than when I *am* a mower. It is a psychological effect. While mowing and weeding, one cannot talk. It is quite impossible. The pursuit calls for almost complete silence. My guests follow me around as I mow, and soon they converse among themselves in whispers. It is quite extraordinary, but very restful. I always hum a little when I weed, but I refuse to chat, and my guests soon realize that. I do not fancy that they enjoy my humming—it is a horrible thing to listen to—but I can hum for half an hour without stopping, and I do it. My guests would have been so much better off in bed!

BEFORE I became a commuter, I used to dread visiting my country friends, and being dragged around their gardens. It was something I despised very thoroughly. I could never understand the fun of the thing, and always swore that if I ever owned property, I would have gardeners, and labourers to take care of it. How I hated having the "produce" explained to me! How small I felt when I had admired what I thought to be geranium, or Sweet William, and was told that they were potatoes! How insignificant I judged myself to be when I mistook onions for carnations! How they all laughed at me! I was the comedian—the clown of the occasion.

"Oh, he thought that was a narcissus," one would say, as I misjudged a harmless carrot.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" another would laugh. "He says that the Brussels sprouts are mignonette."

Don't think that *I* ever refused to take a nap. I should have welcomed one but nobody put the matter up to me. The idea of asking guests to sleep, in order to put them out of their misery, is *mine.* I own the copyright, and I am proud of it. In *my* day, I had no alternative, and was always shown the beauties of the garden. It was my bugbear. Later, of course, I learned that silence is golden, and refused to give myself away. Oh, I like being amusing, and furnishing entertainment to my host, or hostess, but I tire of being a clown. They used to shriek with laughter at my mistakes, and quote me for weeks after—sometimes my literary friends used me as a "topic" in their stories—and that gradually affected my peace of mind.

SO you see, it is really to spare my friends much mortification that I invariably suggest a Sunday nap after dinner. I want to avoid dragging them around the garden, for I know what that means. In winter of course there is no garden, and the minstrel show is inevitable. You talk yourself absolutely speechless—in fact, you talk until nothing is left but personalities, which are not considered quite the thing.

In summer, you always give your friends large bunches of flowers to take home with them, whether they want them, or not. That is part of the régime. They look awfully uncomfortable as they set off for the station, with their arms full of flowers, but it is the correct proceeding, and they would not dare to object. That always happened to me years ago, and I

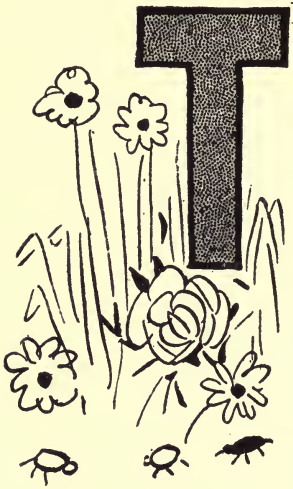
never hesitated to throw the flowers away, as soon as I was out of sight. I am very fond of flowers, but I hate carrying them—I hate carrying anything in fact—and I would much sooner buy them in the city. Besides, you get much nicer flowers in the city.

I always smile sardonically when my guests depart with huge bunches of roses, ferns, and pinks, and wonder how far they will go before they fling them away. I always flung mine about two hundred yards from the station. You see I am perfectly candid. My candour may seem a bit *too* candid, but I like to tell the truth, even when it seems to militate against myself.

I DARE you to say that you do not like gardening. Yes, I dare you to say it. You may be willing to confess certain blights in your character; you may not mind admitting to your brain dozens of the horrid ideas that the "New Thought" condemns; you may announce publicly your dislike of many things upon which convention has set the stamp of approval; but you *dare not* say that you do not like gardening.

Gardening brings you close to nature, you know; it mantles your cheek with the glow of health—and all that sort of thing; it aids and abets your digestion, which may be furtive or recalcitrant; it distracts your thoughts from the mercenary and the worldly, and the sordid. It does all that, and it does more. Oh, very much more!

Therefore you like gardening. You like it just as much as I do.

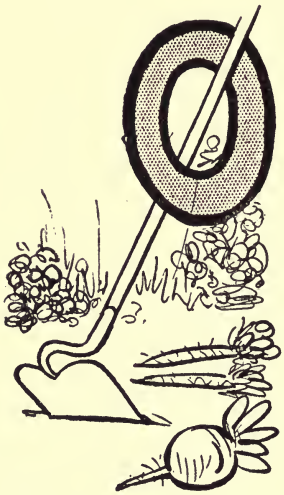


THREE things grow in gardens—flowers, vegetables, and weeds. The first are regarded as pastimes for the man of luxury, and leisure; the second are looked upon as a necessity of the sternest order; the third, like the poor, are always with us. I should have liked to give up my garden to roses, of which I am very fond, instead of to carrots and cabbages, which I loathe, but I lacked the courage of my convictions. I always think that carrots are the most sickening food invented; really, if I were starving, I could not eat carrots, but my garden is full of them. It had to be. Carrots seem to be the duty that the commuter owes to the community.

You go confidingly to the gentleman who sells garden seeds, and you ask him imploringly to help you out. He is supposed to be full of ideas, as his livelihood depends upon them. You tell him that you are new to the country, and are gardenly ignorant, and he listens sympathetically, if a trifle restively. You insinuate that you want your garden to be a trifle different to those that you see around you. You have an "original" twist in your constitution. He is still sympathetic, but more restive. You buy a great deal of stuff that he recommends, and when you get it home, you discover that carrots predominate, and that you have enough to feed the village, *if* they materialize, and they always do.

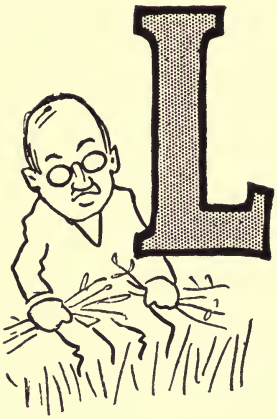
Roses may suffer in a delicately lovely way; pinks may wither and hide their poor little fragrant heads; dahlias may blow down in the wind, and even potatoes may die from a devastating "bug." But carrots will never fail you. Even if you never eat them, and have no friends who can tolerate them, they grow persistently, and every seed-gentleman fills your

garden with them. I may say the same of "beets."



ONE year, I declared bravely that nothing would induce me to give garden room either to carrots or beets. That remark caused the greatest consternation—oh, I am not exaggerating; people in the village stared at me, as though they had discovered my infamy. One or two neighbours cut me dead, as though I were a pariah. Really, I couldn't stand it. I reasoned to myself that if carrots and beets were so necessary, and so beneficial, and so moral, then I had better cultivate them. It was such a little thing after all. Ever since, I have planted carrots and beets religiously. When they come up, I throw them away, but I plant them! I do my duty.

I am bound to say that my toil in the garden is figurative rather than literal. I stand around and watch the planting being done, and I find it quite interesting. I am not at all lazy, and I am very energetic (they say I am "ambitious" in the village) but somehow or other, I plant very badly. I don't know why. I only know that the things I plant, never come up. I used to think that all one had to do, was to throw things into the ground, and then wait for their growth, but experience has taught me that not everything comes up, and that it is a speculative game. The ground seems to discard everything that I give it—rather haughtily. So I let the others do it, and busy myself in some other way.



LOOKING around for a garden pastime, I decided that weeding was the pursuit for me. Weeding is not an intellectual pastime, but it is healthful. It is quite as good as golf, for it keeps you out in the air—which is all I ever discovered in favour of golf.

I used to take a day off, and weed. At the end of the day—the perfect day—I always found, that in spite of my work, nothing appeared to have been accomplished. The weeds mocked and sneered, and triumphed, and refused to be ousted. Everything that has been written about weeds—"Ill weeds grow apace," "the ill weed groweth fast," "pernicious weed, whose scent the fair annoys" (I rather think that the last refers to tobacco, but it doesn't matter) and

"O thou weed
Who art so lively fair and smell'st so sweet
That the sense aches at thee,
Would thou hadst never been born"

appears to be true, and I could add a great deal to the weed literature. One year, I saw what was apparently a beautiful fruit growing on a strawberry bed. Somebody told me that it was a wild strawberry, and that if I cared for it, and tended it, it would be a magnificent plant. I did it. I had it diligently fertilized; in the winter it was covered up and coddled, like an invalid. Every day I watched it and gloated over it. I spent a lot of money on it, and when spring came, I was there joyously anticipatory.

It turned out to be a weed, and really a noxious weed. It grew four feet high, and blazoned forth a horribly yellow blossom, with a nauseating odour. It was such an eyesore, that it had to be pulled up, and the roots thrown far away; in fact, I paid a man in a cart to take

those weeds with him to the end of whatever journey he might be making.

WHEN weeding, I found that I gave great dissatisfaction, as it seemed that I frequently removed, with the weeds, valuable plants. I suppose that I grew careless. I started by plucking separately at every weed that I saw; then, when I found that I was making no headway, I became reckless, and took out handfuls of apparent weeds. Half of the contents of my hands, I was told, indicated vandalism, on my part.

They said I was too nervous to weed artistically, so finally I gave it up, reluctantly, for after all, it was the best thing I did.

The most annoying thing about the garden, is coping with all the nasty obstructionists that beset your work. As in real life, you are con-

fronted with parasites, so in the garden, they make you miserable. The parasites ate my roses, my ramblers, my fruit, my tomatoes, my lettuce. They ate everything but the carrots. Even the parasites seem to dislike carrots. They could have had all my carrots, and I should not have repined. I wouldn't have sprayed them away. I wouldn't have fed them with poisonous compounds. In fact, I would have nourished them, if only I could have prevailed upon them to take a fancy to the carrots. It was impossible. Like me, they despised the carrots. This was a bond of sympathy at least between the parasites and me.

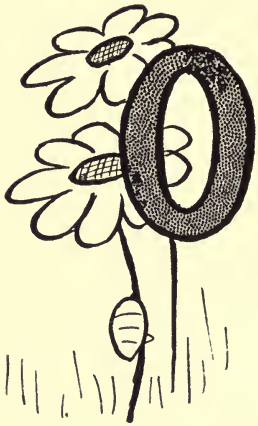
I thought that perhaps the study of garden pests would be interesting, and I took it up. It is much more difficult than differential calculus, or trigonometry. Those you can eventually cope with, but you can never solve the dark mysteries of parasite life. I think that garden parasites must enjoy themselves immensely. They always appear to be having such a good time, with an unlimited area of invasion.

I DISCOVERED that beans, tomatoes, and celery suffer from a terrible disease called "anthracnose." I was just going to ask you if you had ever had it, when I remember that you are not a bean, or a tomato, or celery—so silly of me! You combat this disease by a compound entitled "Bordeaux Mixture." It is also aided, they say (by "they say" I mean of course "*on dit*") by ammoniacal copper carbonate, and summer strength lime sulphur.

Personally, I would sooner have anthracnose, in its worst form, than be sprayed with ammoniacal copper carbonate, but I did my duty by my beans, tomatoes, and celery. The beans, tomatoes and celery came up in due course, and were quite healthy, and some may say that this was due to my treatment with ammoniacal cop-

per carbonate. I am of the opinion that this was one of the occasions when they would have come up anyway, and that the disease would have been just as effectively treated by Christian Science. Oh, I have come to be a great believer in Christian Science for plants.

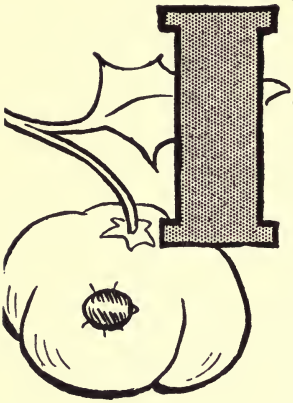
If you listen to the grievance makers on gardens, you will be busy with all sorts of medicaments. I think that vegetables are very often *malades imaginaires.* I was told to dust sulphur over cucumbers—poor things that hadn't opened their mouths in complaint; to use hellebore on the cabbages. I have always hated profanity, and hellebore suggests it so signally. It was a long time before I could make up my mind to give my cabbages hell—ebore, but finally I did it.



ONE day a neighbour rushed in frantically and asked me if I had noticed any cutworms in the plants. He seemed to be all wrought up, and beside himself; I told him that I had not been expecting cutworms, and was even ignorant of their appearance. I was quite sure that I should not know a cutworm when I saw him—or it. I said philosophically: "What you look for you get." However, he didn't "get" me. I must have been too subtle.

Then he explained. Cutworms, he said, were fat, round worms, brown with dark stripes—imagine examining any worm to see if it owned dark stripes—and that the special hobby of the worm was cutting through the stems of the plants. He told me to be careful to trap them under pieces of shingle or flat stones. There

was also another method. I was to go stealthily at nightfall out—out—into the night, and scatter a mash made of one quart of wheat bran, one teaspoonful of Paris green, or of white arsenate, or one teaspoonful of cheap molasses, mixed with water. I did this. I felt like a burglar, furtively feeling my way, at nightfall and then cruelly scattering the mash. It was useless. I am no cook. I imagine that I mixed the wheat bran and the Paris green in wrong proportions. It *looked* very delicious, but perhaps it was too nice. At any rate, the cutworms seemed to perk up, and to take a new lease of life. I think I did them a lot of good.



I WAS seriously warned against the flea beetle. It loves tomatoes—they all seem fond of tomatoes. How *can* you hate a beetle that likes exactly the same things that you like? After all, when you come to think of it, the flea beetle had just as much right to the tomatoes as I had. However, that is of course, a very foolish manner of reasoning. The flea perhaps had right, but I had might. 'Tis ever thus. The flea beetle is small, hard-shelled, and jumping. It punctures the tomato leaves. You just make an emulsion of kerosene, and "lay on Macduff."

I found it awfully hard work emulsioning each leaf, and surely you know how many leaves tomatoes have. Really, it was quite baffling. I gave up important work in order to treat the tomatoes with this emulsion; I put on a special

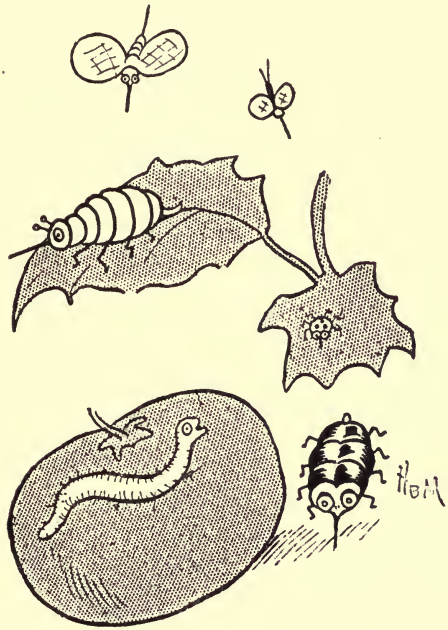
costume—my kerosene emulsion garb—and I did as much as I possibly could. I missed a few plants, and oddly enough, it was the plants I missed that bore the best tomatoes. One or two of those that I plastered with kerosene emulsion died without a murmur. They simply gave up the ghost with the flea beetle.

Then there is the "mealy bug." That really angered me, because I was told that it attacked flowers. It had no use for tomatoes, strangely enough. I suppose that bugs, like human beings, have their likes and dislikes. However, the remedy was difficult. It consisted of the application of alcohol with a small brush, to the suffering flowers. I must have looked awfully silly, running around, painting things with alcohol. If alcohol had displayed some color, it would have been easier, but I was never sure what part I had treated, as it showed no trace of this treatment. Not once, did I see a "mealy bug" die. I believe that it just pretends to hate alcohol, as many human beings do, for the sake of appearances. I think that it took its nip, and enjoyed it immensely. My

opinion is that the "mealy bug" would have revelled in a cocktail.

MANY of the parasites that gardeners hate (I really never admit hatred into my heart) must be picked off by hand. Oh, there are dozens of parasites that I may allude to as "hand-pickable." You must hand-pick the potato beetle, the yellow or black striped cucumber beetle, and—caterpillars. Honestly, I never could hand-pick caterpillars. I do not hate them, as I said before, but they nauseate me. I see them in night-mares occasionally, and they awaken me with a start. Certainly I could never hand-pick them. They could eat all my garden, and all my neighbour's garden, before I would pluck them away by hand. I believe that you *can* give them arsenate of lead, or Paris green, or hellebore, but I refuse to deal with

them at all. I know they would haunt me. I am afraid of them. They are sinister, demoniacal, morose things! I just treat them with



contempt, and nobody has ever told me that contempt is of the least use in a garden.

As for the "squash bug," it has a "lively flat back." How a flat back *can* be lively, I

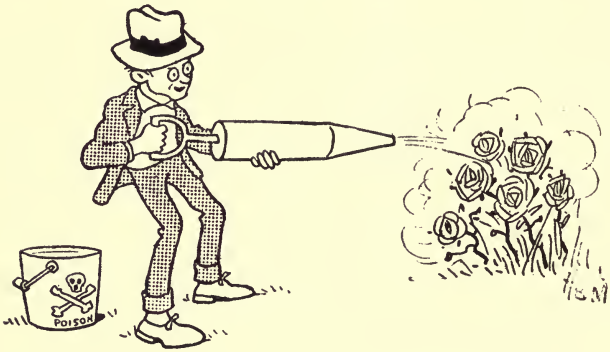
don't know. I should think that a flat back would be extremely dull, but the "squash bug" owns one. They advise nicotine for its extinction. What with the nicotine, and the alcohol that you are directed to use in your garden, you would imagine that all parasites loved luxuries rather than necessities.

I should like to hear of some pest that you could exterminate by means of bread pudding or fish cakes—or some simple natural diet, but they all appear to hanker for alcohol, or nicotine, or expensive poisons. Why is it that no "bug" ever seems to die from cereals, or wholesome breakfast foods? Some day, I shall sally forth and plaster bread pudding all over the tomato plants, for my opinion is that they could never survive such an application.

I THOUGHT at one time that it was easy to spray roses with the various mixtures that are recommended for the treatment of the horrid "rose fly." It is a fiendish task. You mix a spoonful of something—and everybody tells you something different—in a gallon of water, and then fill the sprayer. At first it seems rather a pleasant exercise, but you have to keep at it for hours, and you are overcome with exhaustion, while the rose fly actually appears to be refreshed, as by a cool bath.

The insect is impossible. It likes everything it *shouldn't* like. You ask a dozen people for the best exterminator, and you get a dozen totally different solutions, and *not* solutions of the problem. The rose fly thrives on them all.

The rose fly laughs at you. The spray merely appears to make its life more endurable, and improves its appetite. I have even carted away cans filled with rose flies, hand-picked, and actually watched over them ghoulishly until they were dead. However, their progeny was so



numerous, that they didn't even seem to miss those that had gone before. There was not the slightest sign of mourning, or lamentation.

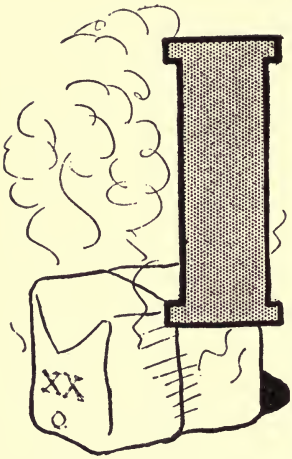
"*Le roi est mort; vive le roi!*" says the rose fly. My advice is to give the rose fly full fling. Let it simply revel to the point of satiety. I have not discovered that it ever reaches the satiety point, but I should imagine that it must

do so. Everything does. Tell the rose fly to do its worst. Care for it, and ask your neighbour to bring some of his to keep it company. I really believe that the best thing for the rose fly is kindness. You have heard of killing by kindness. Well, try it on the rose fly. There is no use in being vindictive. Certainly I do dislike to see my pet blossoms infested with this horrid enemy, but I have decided that nothing revengeful will be of the least use. I wish I could train the rose fly to prefer carrots, or beets, but really it is a very sensible insect. You must take off your hat to the rose fly. It likes the best that there is, and nothing else. It has good taste; in a way, it is artistic; it has discrimination and—with an accent on the "and"—it has persistence, amounting to grim determination.

THE rose fly will *not* give up the rose. It will never desert it. It really has an affectionate nature, and if you can only get into the perspective, you must admire it. You *can* drive away other parasites—*you* can, but I can't—but the rose fly will baffle your most strenuous attempts. It will stay with the rose, until there is nothing left to stay with, and then it disappears, probably to die of chagrin. Do not imagine for one moment, that I love the rose fly—how could I love anything that destroyed my best?—but I do admire its persistence, and its moral courage in the face of difficulties, and sprayers. You might have thought that the mere sight of the invasion I made when I filled a can with rose flies, and then awaited their demise, would have stricken the survivors with horror and dread.

Not at all. They were neither down-hearted, nor cast down. They wasted no time in useless regrets. They never paused for a moment. They went on eating the roses voraciously, and agreeably, and of course there were more roses for each survivor. We grieve at war, at invasion, at devastation, but not so the rose fly! What a lesson it teaches us, and WHAT an appetite it has!

Even Christian Science failed lamentably. I said to myself: "There is not a rose fly on the ramblers, and there never will be a rose fly on the ramblers. It is my mistake; my error." In the face of the avid swarm that greeted me next day, I could not make the aforesaid affirmation again. I should have felt so silly, and I am sure that the rose flies must have a keen sense of humour, and would have been inordinately amused at my expense.



I MADE a rapid study of fertilizers, and discovered that they are very much better than they smell. Some of them are indescribably pungent, and those are the best. If you want a good fertilizer, always sniff at it, and if you are absolutely nauseated, and ready to fall by the wayside, you can be certain that it is the best that money can buy. Avoid the fertilizer that is inoffensive.

It is difficult to get the fertilizers to your home, as the commuters in the train never seem to appreciate it, though they know it so well—and perhaps that is why. Although they are frequently fertilizer-laden, they look askance at their neighbour with *his* package, and they savour his guilty secret. You may say that the heavily laden atmosphere of the smoker, with its pipes, cigars, and cigarettes, would deaden

the odour of the fertilizer. In that case I may inform you that you do not know the possibilities of the fertilizer. There is no atmosphere that could deaden it.

I was told by a fanatic, to cover my front

lawn with fertilizer, and that if I did so, the lawn would be so radiantly green, so verdantly spectacular, that people would come from miles to see it. Naturally, I did what he suggested, and people ran for miles away from it. Really I hated to go home. It was impossible to get

into the house, without that dreadful fertilizer making itself apparent, even to the most ingenuous and unsophisticated nose. I could scent my home from the train, and I am not near the station. The tradespeople made all sorts of excuses to avoid delivering things at my house. Even the dogs fought shy, and not a cat came within reasonable distance of my house while that fertilizer held the fort.

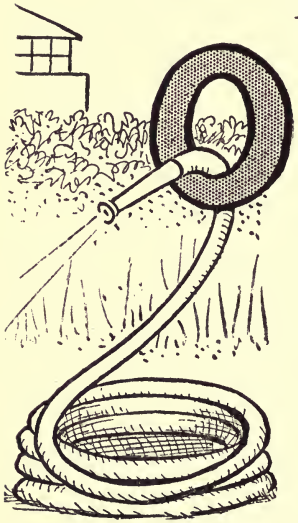
I WOULD have removed it, but it was impossible. It had to stay until the snow came to cover its infamy. I admit that my lawn was a lovely shade of green in the following spring, but if I knew that without fertilizer, my lawn would be scarlet, purple, or pale blue, I would never have it there again. I may be finicky, but in this case, I am at least altruistic. It offended others as it

offended me, though the others could, and did stay away from its vicinity.

There are fashions in fertilizers, and sometimes you are told that plants are not "wearing" that particular brand, this season. The latest is always the best, and therefore the most unpleasant. Nobody in the seed shops smiles if you crack a joke on the subject of fertilizer. At first I used to try to be humorous, but I found that it was a mistake. It is a very serious matter, and comment is stupid. Nobody sees the point of any joke you may perpetrate. That is always exasperating. Still, I have never quite succeeded in treating the fertilizer with the respect it demands, and for that reason, I am unpopular. I cannot speak of fertilizer as though it were something grand, inspiring, and thrilling, so I am silent on the subject.

It should be delivered by aeroplane to every house, but I would not dare to say so to any purveyor. He would regard me as insane. It is given you in a bag, like sugar, or in a packet like biscuits, and you set forth for your destina-

tion, a marked man. And long after you have reached your destination, you are still marked. Sometimes you are marked for several days. However, you *must* be serious about it.



N the subject of artificial irrigation, I shall be mute. It is a sore topic with me. Frequently I have arrived home at an early hour, placed the hose at the faucet, and watered the garden for hours at a time, and then a tremendous storm would come up, and inundate what I had merely gently irrigated. It has always seemed to me that I have tried to beat Nature, and Nature will never stand that. At other times, after I have thoroughly irrigated everything, I have been told that I have washed off all the medicaments that have been placed everywhere for the

extinction of the parasites. My advice is to leave everything to the rain, and that makes it delightfully easy. The "gentle Rain" you know "droppeth from Heaven upon the place beneath." And I might add that "the quality of mercy is not strained." There is no purchasable hose that can compete successfully with the "gentle rain that falleth from Heaven."

Irrigation is a very pleasant pastime. I am very fond of it, and I really understand it—it is one of the few things that I *do* understand—but it is futile, and more picturesque than useful. Much better to go back to the hammock, and wait for the storm. Everything comes to him who waits—particularly the storm.

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